DRAGON AGE™
OMNIBUS

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THE SILENT GROVE
THOSE WHO SPEAK
UNTIL WE SLEEP

STORY
DAVID GAIDER

SCRIPT
ALEXANDER FREED

ART
CHAD HARDIN

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MICHAEL ATIYEH

LETTERING
MICHAEL HEISLER

DARK HORSE BOOKS

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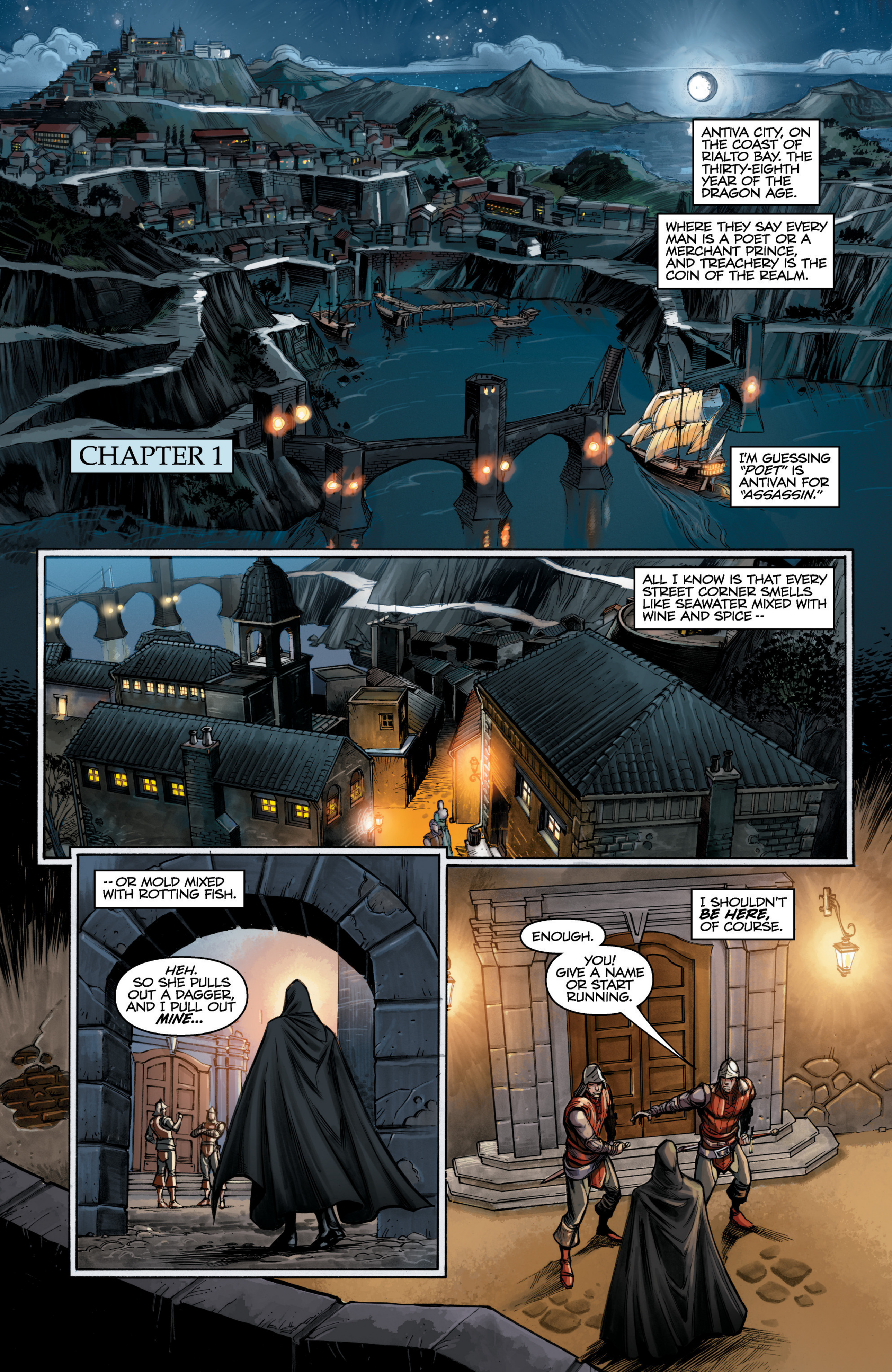

ANTIVA CITY, ON THE COAST OF RIALTO BAY. THE THIRTY-EIGHTH YEAR OF THE DRAGON AGE.
WHERE THEY SAY EVERY MAN IS A POET OR A MERCHANT PRINCE, AND TREACHERY IS THE COIN OF THE REALM.
CHAPTER 1
I'M GUESSING "POET" IS ANTIVAN FOR "ASSASSIN."
ALL I KNOW IS THAT EVERY STREET CORNER SMELLS LIKE SEAWATER MIXED WITH WINE AND SPICE --
-- OR MOLD MIXED WITH ROTTING FISH.
HEH. SO SHE PULLS OUT A DAGGER, AND I PULL OUT MINE...
I SHOULDN'T BE HERE, OF COURSE.
ENOUGH.
YOU! GIVE A NAME OR START RUNNING.

MY NAME IS ALISTAIR THEIRIN, AND I'M *KING* OF FERELDEN.
SON OF MARIC THE SAVIOR?
YOU'RE... REALLY NOT CONVINCED, ARE YOU?
CONVINCE THE DEAD.
I SHOULDN'T BE HERE *ALONE*...

GKK

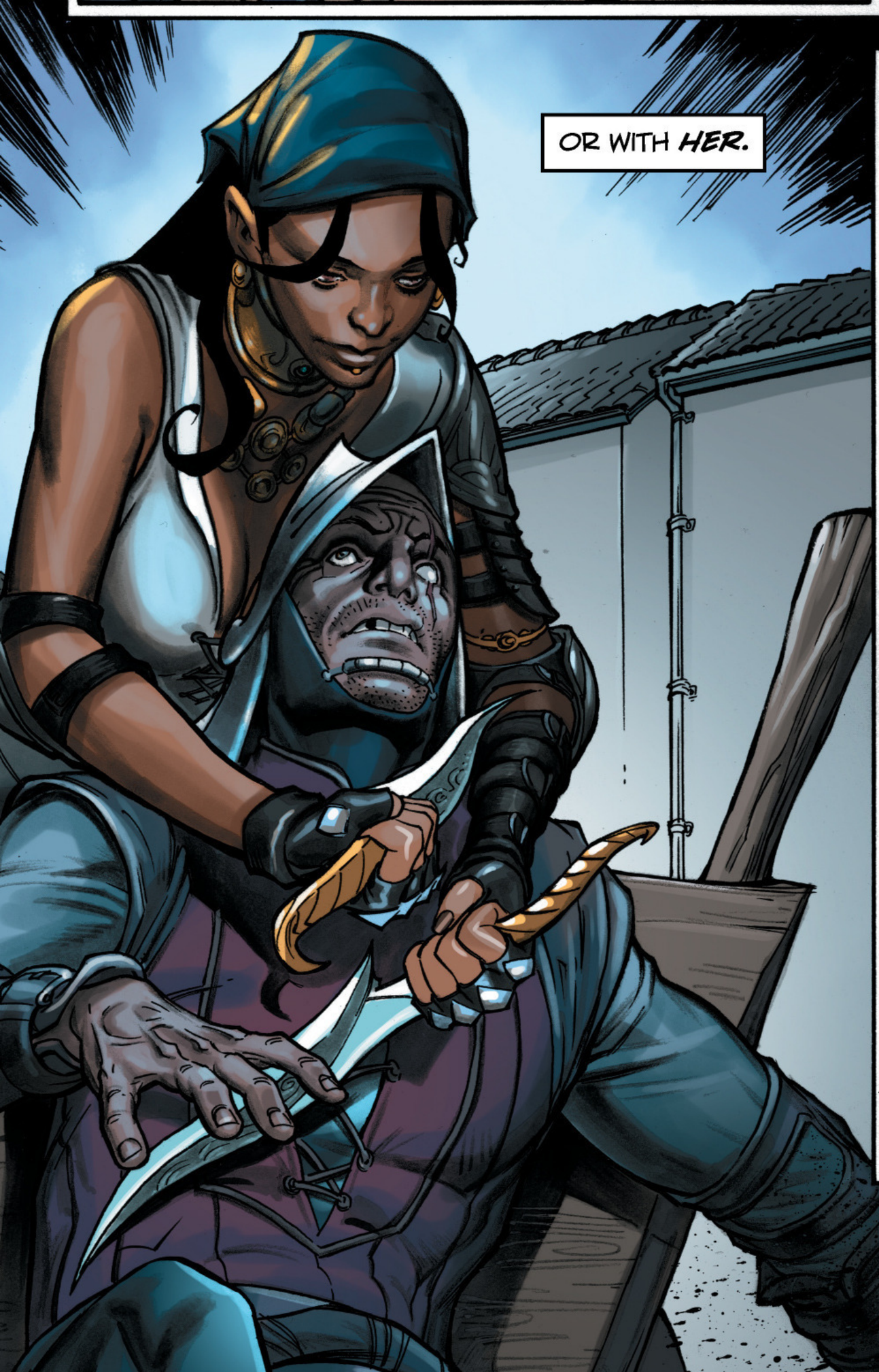
LET THE CROWS TAKE YOU.

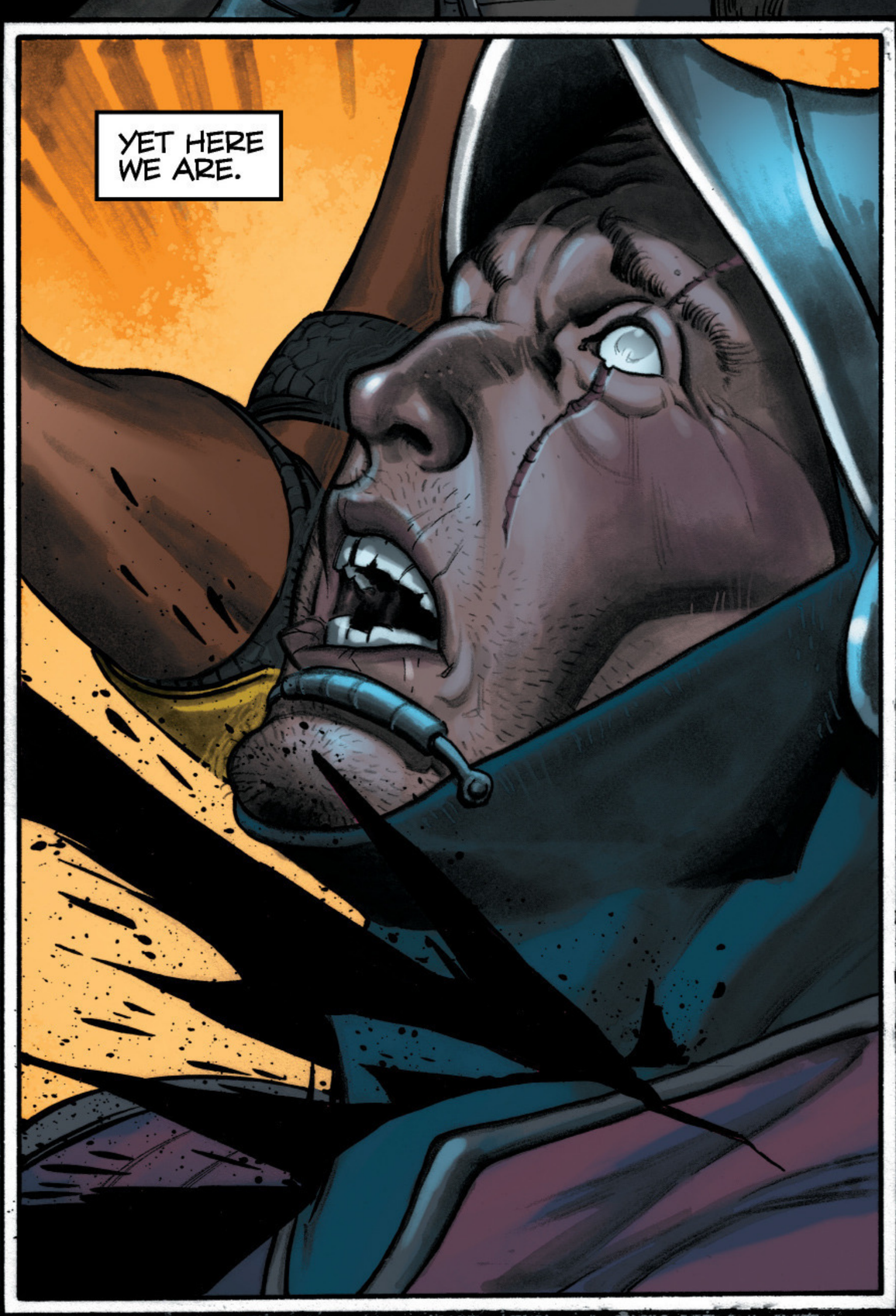
AH!

...AND I CERTAINLY SHOULDN'T BE HERE WITH *HIM*.
THREE NIGHTS IN ANTIVA, AND ALREADY THE SHOOTING STARTS.
IF ONLY I COULD BE SURPRISED.

CROWS WILL GUT THEM.
CROWS WILL SCATTER THEIR GUTS ON THE STREET --

WHAT AN ADORABLE IMAGINATION.
I KNEW AN ENTERTAINER WHO PERFORMED WITH DOG INTESTINES -- TERRIBLE MESS AT THE BAZAAR, THOUGH HE LOVED THE WORK.


OR WITH *HER*.


YET HERE WE ARE.

SHE CALLS HERSELF ISABELA. PIRATE. THIEF. SHARPEST BLADE IN RIVAIN, AND AN OLD... ACQUAINTANCE, OF SORTS.

SHE KNOWS ANTIVA -- AT LEAST THE PARTS I NEED TO VISIT.

YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO KILL HIM.

YOU KILLED HIM -- THE MOMENT YOU GAVE HIM YOUR *NAME.*

WHO DOES THAT?

CUT HIM SOME SLACK, RIVAINI.

MOST KINGS CAN'T SPEAK A WORD WITHOUT A SCRIPT FROM THEIR ADVISORS.

THE DWARF IS VARRIC TETHRAS -- A MERCHANT WHO ACTS LIKE A BARKEEP OR A SPYMASTER, DEPENDING ON THE HOUR.

ISABELA'S TRAVELING COMPANION...AND NOW MINE, APPARENTLY.

FINE, FINE.

LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH --

YOU THINK THAT WAS HIS COMMANDING VOICE?

I'M SURE IT WORKS IF YOU'RE *FROM* FERELDEN.

-- *BEFORE* THE CROWS FIND US RAIDING THEIR ARCHIVE, PLEASE?

AS FOR ME? I'M A KING WHO SHOULDN'T BE.
AND I'VE MISSED WALKING INTO DEATH WITH THE WRONG PEOPLE AT MY SIDE.
HAVE YOU EVER DEALT WITH THE CROWS BEFORE, OH KING?
SORT OF.
THEN YOU UNDERSTAND THEY'RE NOT MERELY ASSASSINS --
(VERY TALENTED ASSASSINS, MIND YOU.)
-- BUT THE INSIDIOUS LITTLE VOICE IN EVERY ANTIVAN NOBLEMAN'S EAR?
THAT'S THE RUMOR.
AND WHEN YOUR SOURCE TOLD YOU THAT THEIR CONTRACTS, THEIR BLACKMAIL FILES, THEIR SECRET HISTORIES, AND THEIR RECIPES WERE ALL HERE --
-- YOUR FIRST THOUGHT WAS, "I SHOULD KICK IN THE FRONT DOOR"?
IS THAT A CRITICISM?
NOT AT ALL. IN FACT, I'M IMPRESSED BY --
-- STOP!
WHAT?

NOT THE TIME FOR THIS, VARRIC --
LET HIM WORK.
HUH.
THP THP
TOOTH OF THE SERPENT.
THAT WASN'T SO --
KEEP WATCHING.
THEY TAKE DECADES TO CONSTRUCT.
IT'S CALLED A DRAGON'S CRÈCHE -- A BUILDING DESIGNED TO KILL YOU.
GOOD VANITY PROJECTS FOR THE OLD DWARVEN FAMILIES... CROWS, TOO, APPARENTLY.

I COULD'VE DONE THAT.
NOT WITHOUT KEEN DWARVEN EYES.
YOU DO WHATEVER YOU CAME TO DO.
WE'LL TAKE CARE OF EVERYTHING.
FALLING MOUNTAIN.
POISON WIND.
TRIPWIRE MECHANISM.
FIRE FOUNTAIN.
REALLY? WITH ALL THIS PAPER?
WHEEL OF LIQUID PAIN.
INTERESTING VARIATION ON THE STORM AGE DESIGN...
THIEF'S FOLLY.
A LITTLE OBVIOUS, TOO.

HALT!
FOUND ALL THE TRAPS BUT MISSED THE ALARM. HMPH.
KEEN DWARVEN EYES, INDEED.
HELLO, CLAUDIO.
WELL -- ISABELA.
IF YOU'RE THIS DESPERATE FOR COIN ALREADY, I'M SURE I CAN FIND YOU AN ALLEY SOMEWHERE.
WAIT.
ARE YOU CLAUDIO VALISTI?

THEN YOU'RE KING ALISTAIR?
MALDICIÓN!
I WASN'T EXPECTING YOU TO COME PERSONALLY.
YOU'RE FORTUNATE I WAS THE ONE WHO RESPONDED TO THE ALARM.
I'LL THANK THE MAKER BEFORE BEDTIME.
I HAD TO KNOW IT WAS REAL.
YOU ARE CONVINCED NOW, THEN?
AND VELABANCHEL--
YES.
YES.
I SEE--
--YOU DON'T TRUST THEM.
HOW WISE, YOUR MAJESTY.
I THINK HE'S TALKING ABOUT YOU.
QUIET.
GO. YOU HAVE MAGNIFICENTLY ESCAPED OUR PURSUIT.
KNOW THAT I CANNOT AID YOU FURTHER.

THE HUSBAND YOU KILLED?

THE HUSBAND I HAD KILLED, THANK YOU.

AND HOW DO YOU KNOW THIS "PRINCE AMONG CROWS," OH KING?

ZEVRAN PUT ME IN TOUCH WITH CLAUDIO, AND CLAUDIO'S INFORMATION BROUGHT ME HERE.

ZEVRAN THE ASSASSIN, HM?

ZEVRAN KNOWS A LOT OF PEOPLE.

LIKE YOU KNOW A LOT OF PEOPLE?

LISTEN TO ME, ALISTAIR.

YOU MUSTN'T BELIEVE A WORD THE PESTILENT BASTARD SAYS.

WHATEVER HE'S DONE FOR YOU --

I KNOW.

LOOK, NOBODY UNDERSTANDS COZYING UP TO SNAKES BETTER THAN I DO.
BUT THAT'S A JOB BEST HANDLED BY SOMEONE WHO CAN *AFFORD* BECOMING THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE FAMILY.
NOT THE MAN WITH A REPUTATION -- AND A CROWN -- TO PROTECT.
MY REPUTATION IS THE LEAST OF MY CONCERNS NOW, VARRIC.
AND WITH RESPECT, I DON'T KNOW YOU *OR* YOUR FAMILY.

WELL, I TRIED.
WHAT ABOUT THIS "*VELABANCHEL*," THEN? CLAUDIO MENTIONED --
IT'S A PRISON RUN BY THE CROWS.
MAKES THE ARCHIVE SEEM AS WELCOMING AS A BROTHEL.
PLANNING A VISIT?
SHOULD WE BAKE A CAKE WITH A FILE HIDDEN INSIDE?
THAT *NEVER* WORKS.

I'M PLANNING TO BREAK IN, *TONIGHT*.
WITH OR WITHOUT YOUR HELP.

CHAPTER 2

I NEVER ASKED FOR AN EASY LIFE -- FRUIT EVERY MORNING, SERVANTS CLEANING MY FEET, BEDCLOTHES FREE FROM CRAWLING THINGS.

I CERTAINLY WASN'T RAISED TO ***EXPECT*** IT.

BUT THIS IS VELABANCHEL PRISON, THE HOUSE OF GRAVES, WHERE THE CROWS LOCK MEN AWAY FOR FUN AND TORTURE.

ONE MISTAKE, AND WE SPEND THE REST OF OUR DAYS SHACKLED AND FORGOTTEN IN CELLS BUILT BY LONG-DEAD SADISTS.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, I'M STARTING TO MISS THE ROYAL PALACE.

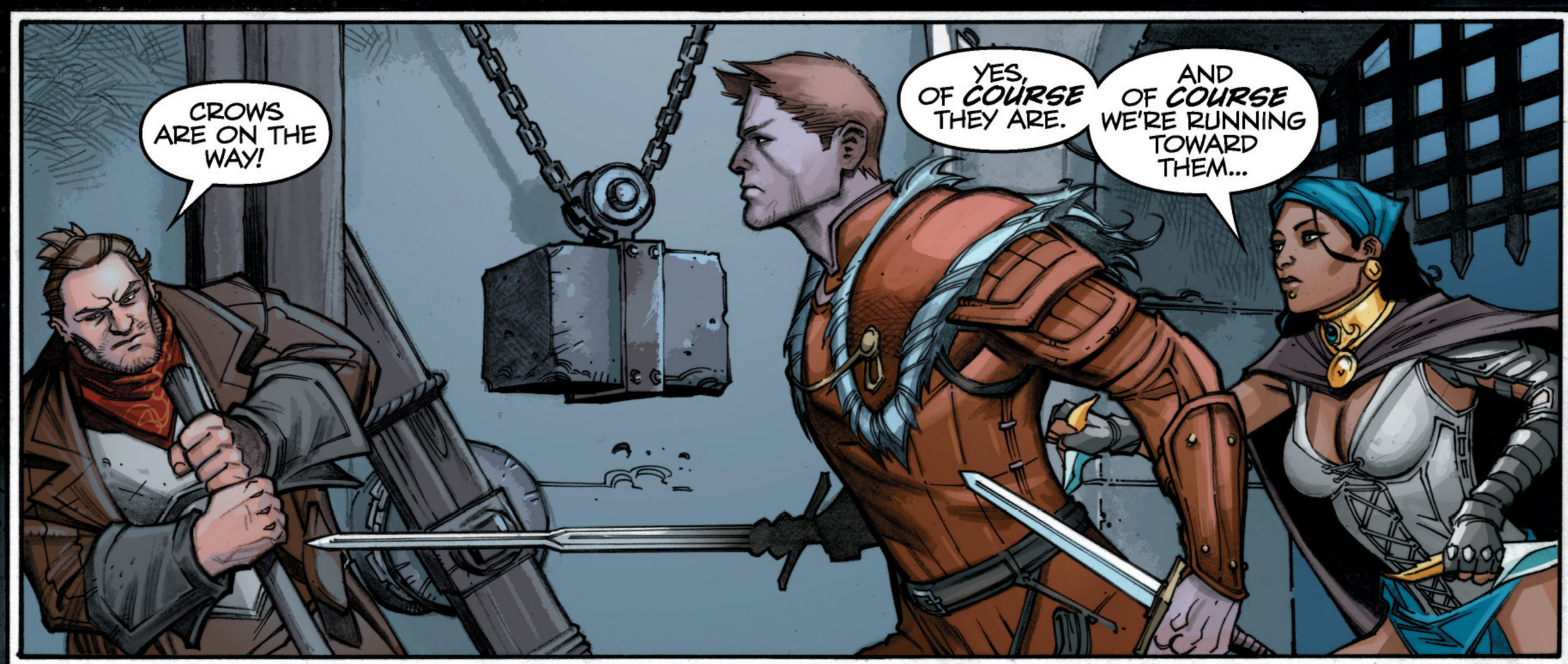
TOO DAMNED COLD.

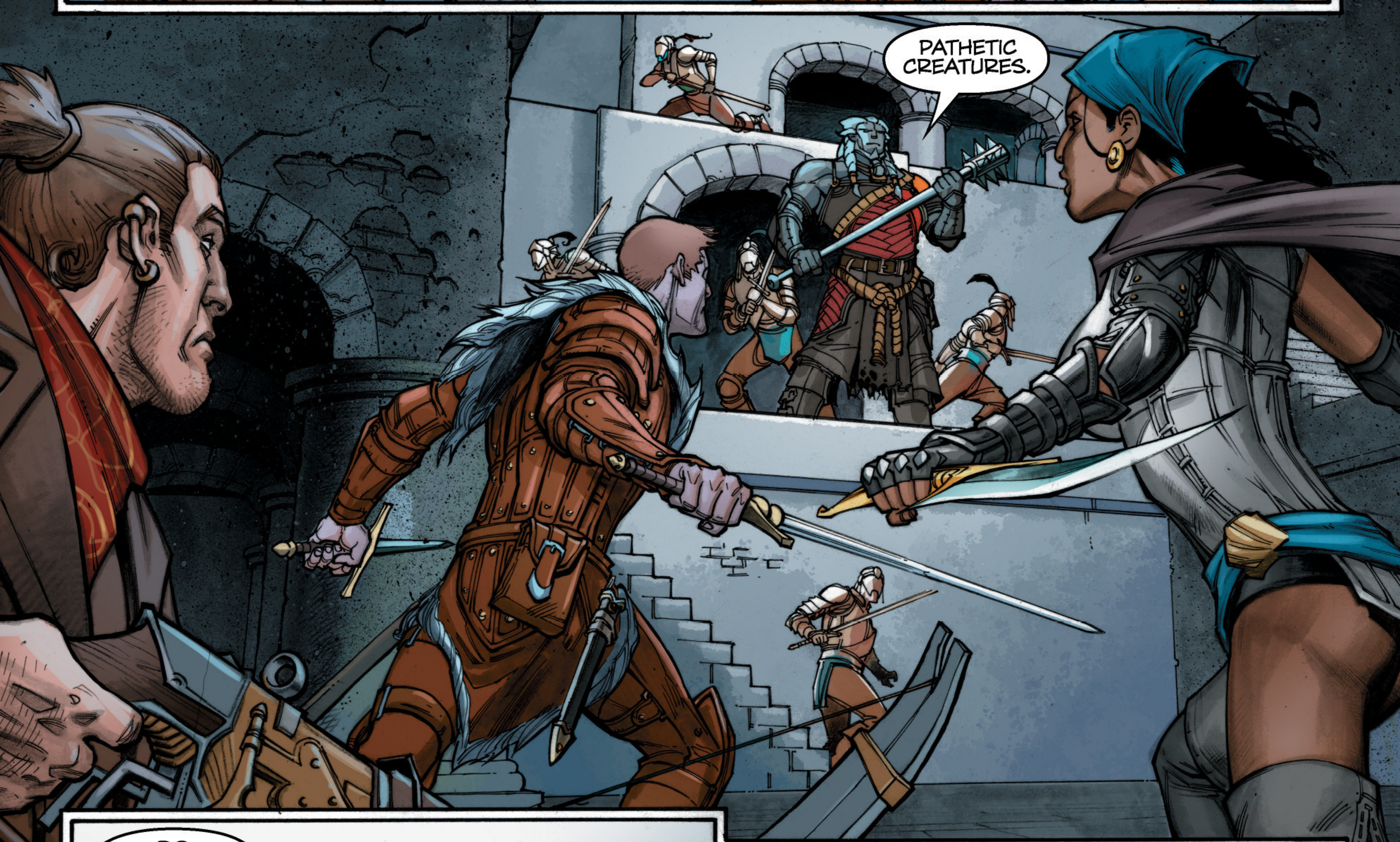
REMIND ME WHY WE'RE HERE, EXACTLY?
A RESCUE.
I WAS ASKING HER -- WHY ARE *YOU* AND *I* HERE?
I *ASKED* YOU TO COME.
WAS I DRUNK?
MAYBE.
SO WHY ARE *YOU* HERE?
BECAUSE PIRACY IS EXPENSIVE, AND OUR FRIEND HERE IS *DRIPPING* WITH COIN.
I HIRED YOU TO BRING ME TO ANTIVA AND HELP ME REACH THE ARCHIVE.
IF YOU WANT TO LEAVE, THEN *LEAVE* -- AND I'LL FIND MY OWN WAY HOME.
WE'LL FIND A WAY HOME.
IF I RAN OFF NOW, I'D MISS THE EXTRA BATHTUB FULL OF *JEWELS* YOU'LL PAY FOR HELPING YOU DO THE IMPOSSIBLE.
(IT'S MY CREW, I'M AFRAID -- ALL TERRIBLY GREEDY.)
BUT WE *DO* HAVE A PROBLEM -- THAT GATE OPENS FROM THE INSIDE.
THAT'S *NOT* A PROBLEM.

I'M NOT SURE HOW MUCH WEIGHT THE ROPE WILL HOLD, BUT DON'T WORRY--
-- I'LL HAVE THE GATE OPEN BY THE TIME YOU'RE FINISHED GAWKING.
DID HE JUST CALL ME FAT?
THAT'S QUITE A CROSSBOW.
HE CALLS IT BIANCA.
I PREFER NOT TO ENCOURAGE HIM.
VARRIC, MY BOY...YOU REALLY KNOW HOW TO PICK YOUR ALLIES.
"YOU DON'T SAY, ISABELA? A CHANCE TO GAIN THE EAR OF A KING?
"WHO COULD REGRET ASSOCIATING WITH ROYALTY?"

INTRUDER!
"AND SO THE STURDY BUT OUT-OF-PRACTICE DWARF RACED TO REMEDY HIS ERROR...
"...AND DID NOT ENTIRELY SUCCEED."

ALL RIGHT -- NO VARRIC, NOTHING TO DO BUT WAIT.
YOU WANT TO TELL ME WHAT ALL THE MYSTERY IS ABOUT?
WHO ARE WE HERE FOR?
I...CAN'T.
DIDN'T YOU USED TO BE FUN?
I THOUGHT THIS WAS ABOUT RECAPTURING THE OLD DAYS FOR YOU -- A DRINK, A SWORD, AND A PARTNER WHO DOESN'T GIVE A DAMN ABOUT YOUR BLOODLINE?
IF ALL YOU WANTED WAS TO SCOWL AND BREAK THINGS, WHY NOT DO THAT AT HOME AND SEND AN ARMY HERE INSTEAD?
IT'S NEVER THAT SIMPLE. BESIDES --
-- I'M NOT DOING THIS AS KING.
BUT YOU ARE A KING.
TRUTHFULLY?
I'M NOT A VERY GOOD KING.
YOU'RE A DIFFICULT MAN, ALISTAIR.
BUT ONLY A GOOD KING WOULD SAY THAT.
STOP PRATTLING AND GET OVER HERE!


CROWS ARE ON THE WAY!
YES, OF COURSE THEY ARE.
AND OF COURSE WE'RE RUNNING TOWARD THEM...


PATHETIC CREATURES.

DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING?
YES.
THEN GO.
WHAT--?

THANK YOU BOTH.

I WILL FIND HIM.
KILL THE OTHERS.
ARE WE SUPPOSED TO BE HEROES, NOW?
OR NOT.
ABSOLUTELY.
I THOUGHT WE'D FIGHT TO THE DEATH, LIKE IN OLD TIMES.
PLAN B, THEN?

THE THIRD LEVEL. THE SEVENTY-NINTH CELL.
I'M FOLLOWING TALLY MARKS DRAWN ON THE WALLS BY *ILLITERATES.*
I'M NOT SURE I'M GOING THE RIGHT WAY, BUT THERE CAN'T *BE* A WORSE PLACE THAN HERE.
THERE ARE SCREAMS FROM THE CELLS LIKE A CHORUS. I'M STUDYING WITH THE TEMPLARS AGAIN, LISTENING TO THE HOLY CHANT, AND I JUST WANT *OUT.*
LIKE DOGS BEFORE A STORM.
THEY HOWL WHEN THE WINDS OF WRATH BLOW.
WHICH DOG ARE *YOU* HERE TO FREE?

NO WAY TO BUY YOU OFF WITH COOKIES, THEN.
ARRGAH!

THERE'S NO SOUND FROM INSIDE. NOTHING I CAN HEAR OVER THE SHOUTING.
AT FIRST, I DON'T EVEN SEE HIM -- I MISTAKE A HUMAN BEING FOR A LUMP OF CLOTH, RAGGED AND FILTHY IN THE CORNER.
THEN HE MOVES.
HE LOOKS AT ME WITH A FLASH OF RECOGNITION IN OLD EYES, AND I FORCE MYSELF TO SAY A NAME:
KING MARIC...?
THE NAME OF MY FATHER.
TOO LATE.
MUCH TOO LATE.
AND WITH THAT, I LEARN MY QUEST HAS FAILED...

CHAPTER 3

...THE CROWS WON'T CATCH A BOAT THIS SIZE, BUT WE'LL SAIL UNTIL MORNING TO BE SURE.

HOW'S THE ARM?

BETTER.

WHAT ABOUT OUR GUEST?

GORGING HIMSELF IN THE GALLEY.

NOT THE MAN YOU WERE HOPING FOR, IS HE?

I WAS LOOKING FOR KING MARIC.

MARIC DISAPPEARED THIRTEEN YEARS AGO AT SEA.

THERE WAS NO TRACE OF HIM, NOTHING TO *FIND* -- UNTIL PRINCE CLAUDIO SENT ME EVIDENCE HE'D BEEN CAPTURED BY THE CROWS.

YOUR *FATHER?*

SO WHY'D WE RESCUE THE OLD MAN?

BECAUSE HE *KNEW* MARIC -- HE *RECOGNIZED* ME AS MARIC'S SON.

AND I NEED ANSWERS.

WE BROUGHT YOU OUT OF THAT PIT.
NOW IT'S TIME TO TALK.
YES. OF COURSE.
YOU WANT KING MARIC?
HE WAS MY CELLMATE.
EVERY DAY, THE CROWS TOOK HIM AWAY TO ASK QUESTIONS.
HE DIDN'T TELL ME WHAT THEY WANTED, AND I NEVER TOLD HIM MY CRIMES.
YOU DON'T, IN THAT... PLACE.
IT WAS THE WITCH OF THE WILDS WHO FREED HIM.
"OUR FOURTH YEAR TOGETHER, SIX DAYS INTO SPRING. I KNOW BECAUSE I COUNTED FALCONS.
"OUR CELL GOT COLD AND THE SCREAMING FROM BELOW STOPPED.
"SOMETHING HISSED."
RELEASE HIM.
"THERE WERE CROWS ALL AROUND HER, AND SHE DIDN'T MOVE. DIDN'T LOOK AT US.
"THEY CAME FOR KING MARIC, AND HE DIDN'T FIGHT THEM.
"I NEVER SAW YOUR FATHER OR THE WITCH AGAIN."

DAMN HER.
I MET FLEMETH IN THE KORCARI WILDS, AND SHE STARTED ME ON THE PATH TO BECOMING KING.
FLEMETH?
WE MET HER ONCE, TOO -- SHE PLAYED A FRIEND OF OURS.
BUT FLEMETH ISN'T THE ONLY WITCH OF THE WILDS.
THEY'RE AFRAID OF ANOTHER FABLE IN ANTIVA -- OR AM I WRONG?
NO.
THIS WAS YAVANA -- THE BEAST OF THE TELLARI SWAMPS.
ANOTHER WITCH?
WONDERFUL.
IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU CAN TELL US?
BEFORE MARIC AND YAVANA DISAPPEARED, HE LEFT A MESSAGE FOR HIS SON.
I HAD CHILDREN, ONCE.
HE SAID HE HAD TO DO IT.
HE SAID HE WAS SORRY.

HE MEANT CAILAN, YOU KNOW.

HIS REAL SON.

I GREW UP TO BE A *TEMPLAR*, NOT A KING -- MY MOTHER WAS A SERVANT, AND MARIC BARELY KNEW I *EXISTED*.

IT WASN'T SO BAD.

THEN CAILAN DIES, YOUR COUNTRY GOES TO WAR, AND YOU COME OUT A HERO.

SOMEONE HAS TO BE KING.

BUT IT WASN'T *SUPPOSED* TO BE *ME*.

I THOUGHT MY FATHER WAS A PRISONER.

IF HE ESCAPED, I NEED TO KNOW IF HE'S ALIVE.

I NEED TO KNOW...

IF HE ABANDONED YOU?

IF HE ABANDONED HIS KINGDOM.

CAN YOU TAKE ME TO THE TELLARI SWAMPS?

FOR YOU?

ANYTHING -- BUT JUST THE *ONCE*.

I'LL TELL THE CREW TO SET COURSE.

ANSELMO! CELSO! HANDS OUT OF YOUR TROUSERS AND UP ON THE MAST!

SHE'S *DIFFERENT* WHEN SHE'S BEING CAPTAIN.

I SORT OF LIKE IT.

AND SO WE SET SAIL TOWARD TELLARI.

WE STOP IN SELENY AND LET THE OLD MAN DEPART WITH A PURSE FULL OF COINS. VARRIC TRIES TO HIRE A GUIDE, BUT NOBODY WILL COME -- NOT FOR A PITTANCE, NOT FOR A FORTUNE.

OMINOUS, THAT.

DURING THE DAY, THE CREW STAYS FOCUSED -- ISABELA MAKES SURE OF IT -- AND AT NIGHT, THE ONES FROM ANTIVA TELL GHOST STORIES ABOUT THE SWAMPS.

THEY TALK ABOUT BEAST MEN AND THE UNBORN CHILDREN OF DROWNED GIRLS, WITH VARRIC ON HAND TO ADD LURID ELABORATION.

IT GETS EASY TO FORGET THAT SOME MONSTERS ARE *REAL.*

WHEN THE CREW STOPS LAUGHING, NONE OF THEM OFFERS TO COME ALONG.

I KEEP HEARING SOMETHING...
HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ME, O KING?
LET'S SAY, "MORE THAN YOU'D LIKE, AND LESS THAN I OUGHT TO."
FINE ANSWER.
AND I'M TOLD YOUR BUSINESS WITH THE MERCHANTS' GUILD IS A COVER FOR YOUR TRADE IN SECRETS.
OR WAS IT THE OTHER WAY AROUND?
STORIES, NOT SECRETS.
ANYWAY, THAT'S WHY I'M HERE.
AND SHE'S HERE BECAUSE SHE THINKS YOU NEED A GROWNUP.
BUT PRINCE CLAUDIO WAS RIGHT -- YOU DON'T TRUST US, AND THERE MUST BE OTHER PEOPLE YOU COULD'VE TAKEN.
WERE YOU WORRIED YOUR LOYAL SUBJECTS WOULD KEEP YOU FROM DOING WHAT YOU CAME TO DO?
OR AFRAID THEY'D LET YOU GET AWAY WITH IT?
BLOODY SWAMPS...

I FOUND ANIMAL TRACKS, BUT THAT'S ALL.
WHAT ARE WE EVEN LOOKING FOR?
SOMETHING UNUSUAL.
LIKE A WITCH WAVING AROUND A BROOMSTICK?
THAT WOULD DO.
OR A CROCODILE GNAWING ON OUR CORPSES?
NOT SO MUCH THAT.
THAT SOUND IS GETTING CLOSER.
CRRRRRRRRRRK
WHAT DO WE DO?
BROWN OUR TROUSERS.

DOES THIS COUNT AS UNUSUAL?

HRRAH!

YOU NEED TO RUN.
NOW.

GRAH!

IN MY LIFE SO FAR, I'VE TAKEN SWORD TO THREE DRAGONS.
GET OUT OF HERE...
THE BIG ONES, I MEAN -- NOT THE ONES THAT LOOK LIKE SCALY, TOOTHY DOGS AND LOVE HORSE MEAT, BUT THE *HIGH DRAGONS* THAT MAKE THE EARTH SHAKE.
NOT EVEN *DARKSPAWN* ARE THAT SAVAGE.
A DRAGON FEEDS ON ANYTHING. A DRAGON EXISTS ONLY TO KILL.
IT'S NOT ATTACKING...?

NO...
YAVANA?
...I AM YAVANA.

MY DARLING.
EVEN SHE TREMBLE WHEN FOR LOOTING BLACK LIFTEEN I FO OWT NO SNOW TWOS ?
CHAPTER 4
RETURN TO THE GROVE.
WHY DIDN'T IT KILL US?
SHE CAN SMELL THE OLD BLOOD IN YOU, SON OF KINGS.
YOU HAVE COME A LONG WAY.

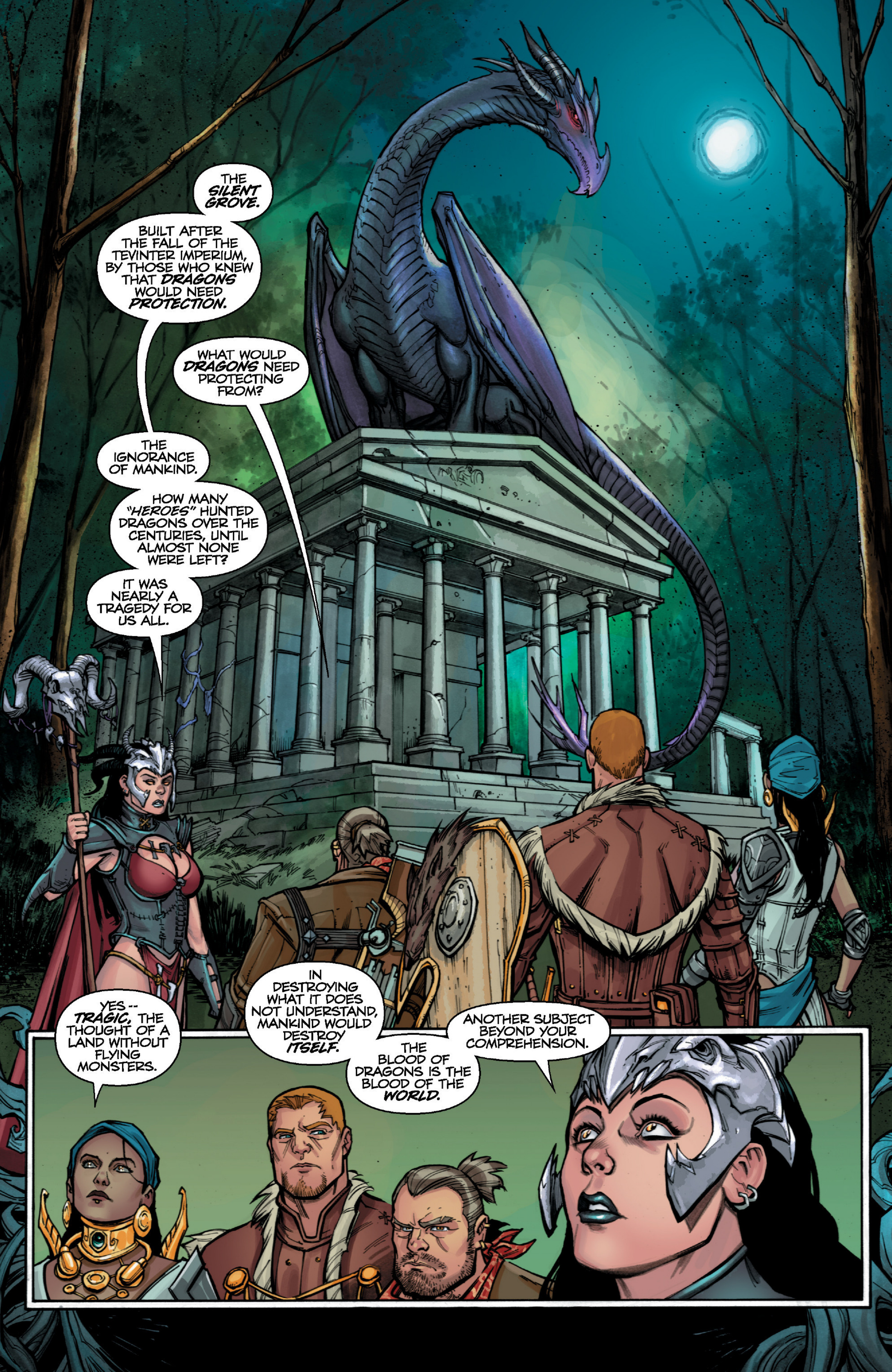
DON'T.
I KNEW MORRIGAN -- I CERTAINLY DON'T TRUST YOU.
MM.
I HAD NO IDEA YOU HAD MET MY SISTER.
THEN YOU'LL BE SHOCKED TO HEAR HOW I ENCOUNTERED YOUR MOTHER.
YES?
WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF HER?
FLEMETH LIKES SUNSETS, TURNING INTO THINGS, AND TALKING ABOUT HOW CLEVER SHE IS.
I'M ALSO TOLD SHE POSSESSES HER DAUGHTERS.
IS THAT RIGHT?
HA!
WHAT'S SO FUNNY?
MORRIGAN FOUND OUT WHAT FLEMETH PLANNED, AND WE STOPPED IT --
THAT POOR, CONFUSED CHILD.
IT IS A GIFT.

YOU CANNOT UNDERSTAND.
STOP!
GO BACK WHENCE YOU CAME, SON OF KINGS.
NOTHING BUT MISERY AWAITS YOU HERE.

WHEN HAS THAT STOPPED A CHEERFUL BUNCH LIKE US?
DON'T MAKE ME INTRODUCE YOU TO BIANCA.

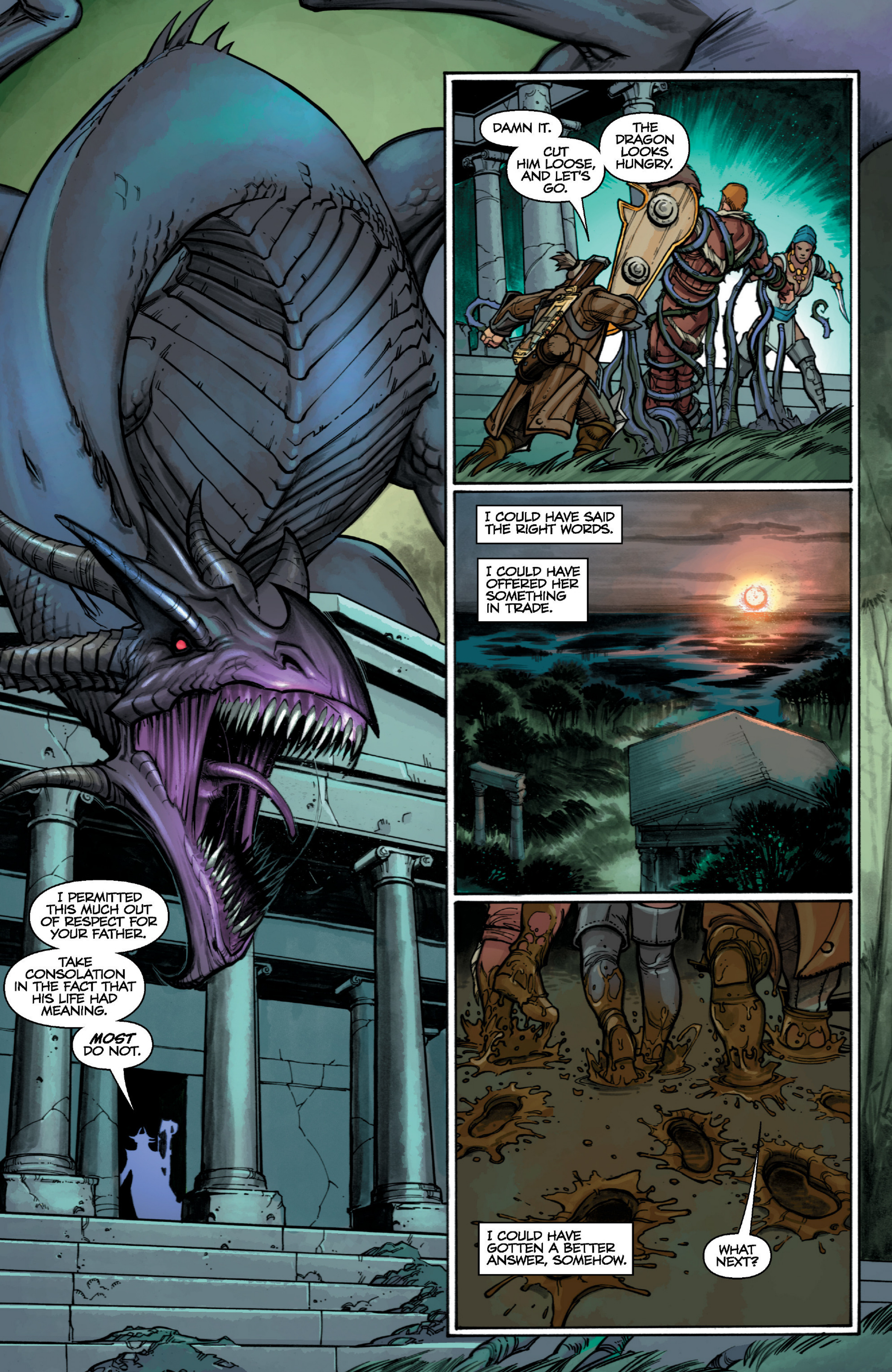
IT'S ALL RIGHT.
I'VE ONLY COME FOR *ONE* THING.
YOU FREED MY FATHER FROM A CROW PRISON.
TELL ME WHY -- TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED.

VERY WELL.
FOLLOW.


THE SILENT GROVE.
BUILT AFTER THE FALL OF THE TEVINTER IMPERIUM, BY THOSE WHO KNEW THAT DRAGONS WOULD NEED PROTECTION.
WHAT WOULD DRAGONS NEED PROTECTING FROM?
THE IGNORANCE OF MANKIND.
HOW MANY "HEROES" HUNTED DRAGONS OVER THE CENTURIES, UNTIL ALMOST NONE WERE LEFT?
IT WAS NEARLY A TRAGEDY FOR US ALL.
YES -- TRAGIC, THE THOUGHT OF A LAND WITHOUT FLYING MONSTERS.
IN DESTROYING WHAT IT DOES NOT UNDERSTAND, MANKIND WOULD DESTROY ITSELF.
THE BLOOD OF DRAGONS IS THE BLOOD OF THE WORLD.
ANOTHER SUBJECT BEYOND YOUR COMPREHENSION.

MEANING YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND EITHER, BUT IT'S WHAT YOUR MOTHER TOLD YOU.
FINE.
WHAT DOES ANY OF THIS HAVE TO DO WITH MARIC?
YEARS AGO, MY MOTHER SAVED YOUR FATHER'S LIFE.
HE WAS PERMITTED TO RESTORE HIS KINGDOM AND PLAY RULER UNTIL HIS CHILDREN WERE GROWN.
BUT AFTER, HE WAS TO COME TO ME HERE.
THAT WAS WHAT HE AGREED TO.
WHY BRING HIM TO THE GROVE?
BECAUSE I COULD NOT PERFORM MY TASK ALONE.
BELIEVE ME, I ENJOY AN OATH-AND-DRAGON TALE AS MUCH AS THE NEXT MAN BUT EVEN I KNOW WHEN TO CUT THE CRYPTIC GARBAGE AND REACH THE POINT.
WHAT HAPPENED TO HIS FATHER?
DID YOU KILL KING MARIC?
I DID NOT KILL HIM -- I CANNOT SPEAK FOR OTHERS.
NOW YOU HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS ANYONE WILL EVER GIVE, SO CONSIDER MY ADVICE A MERCY:
ABANDON YOUR QUEST. WHAT YOU SEEK IS FOREVER BEYOND YOUR REACH.

ENOUGH!
YOU BROUGHT US HERE -- DON'T YOU *DARE* TURN AWAY!
AH!
ALISTAIR!


I PERMITTED THIS MUCH OUT OF RESPECT FOR YOUR FATHER.
TAKE CONSOLATION IN THE FACT THAT HIS LIFE HAD MEANING.
MOST DO NOT.
DAMN IT.
CUT HIM LOOSE, AND LET'S GO.
THE DRAGON LOOKS HUNGRY.
I COULD HAVE SAID THE RIGHT WORDS.
I COULD HAVE OFFERED HER SOMETHING IN TRADE.
I COULD HAVE GOTTEN A BETTER ANSWER, SOMEHOW.
WHAT NEXT?

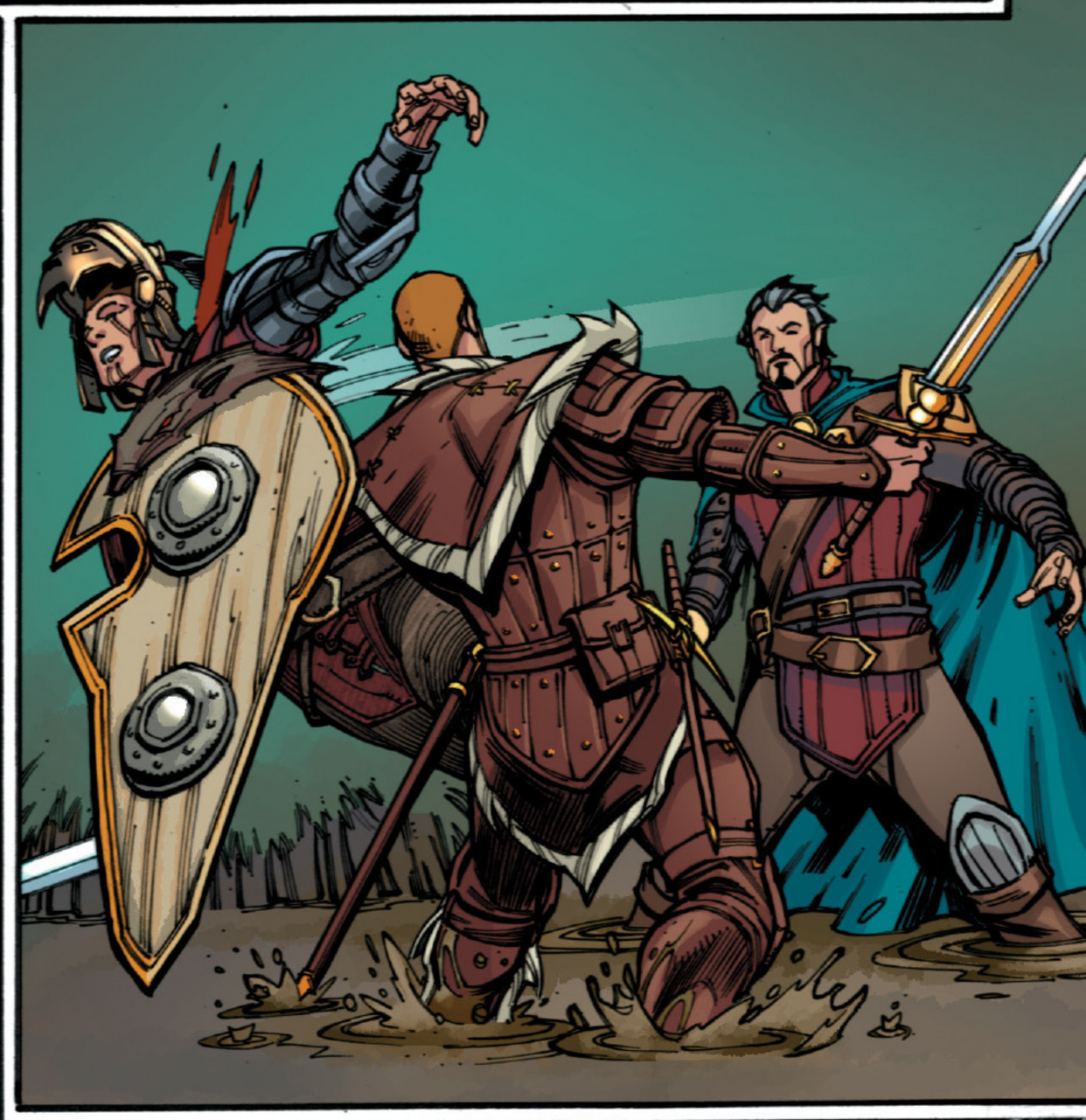
SAY SOMETHING, AT LEAST.
YOU'RE NOT STUPID -- YOU KNEW THE WITCH WOULDN'T BRING OUT YOUR FATHER WITH A CUP OF TEA AND A HUG.
WHAT WERE YOU EXPECTING?
JUST...AN ENDING.
EVEN A GRAVE.
YOU'RE A KING -- YOU GET TO WRITE YOUR OWN ENDING.
FOR NOW, LET'S GET BACK TO THE SHIP.
I DOUBT YAVANA WANTS US SPENDING THE NIGHT IN HER SWAMP.
AGREED.
AHH!

NEXT TIME, PIERCE THE HEART LIKE YOU'RE ASKED.
CLAUDIO!
BASTARD.
WHAT IS THIS?
IF YOU WANTED US DEAD, YOU COULD'VE SAVED US THE TROUBLE AND DONE IT IN ANTIVA.
I COULD HAVE, YES, BUT THIS ISN'T CROW BUSINESS.
MY MASTER HAS BEEN LOOKING FOR THE SILENT GROVE FOR YEARS.
ALAS, THE DRAGON DOESN'T LIKE EXPLORERS -- WE'D NEVER MADE IT THROUGH THE SWAMPS UNTIL TODAY.
MY SINCERE THANKS FOR SHOWING US THE PATH.
WHAT MASTER?
TAKE THE KING ALIVE.
KILL THE OTHERS.

MALDICIÓN...

HAD TO START SOMEWHERE...

BEHIND YOU, VARRIC!



HA!
A FERELDEN KING WHO KNOWS HOW TO FIGHT!

STOP!
WE SURRENDER.
WHAT?

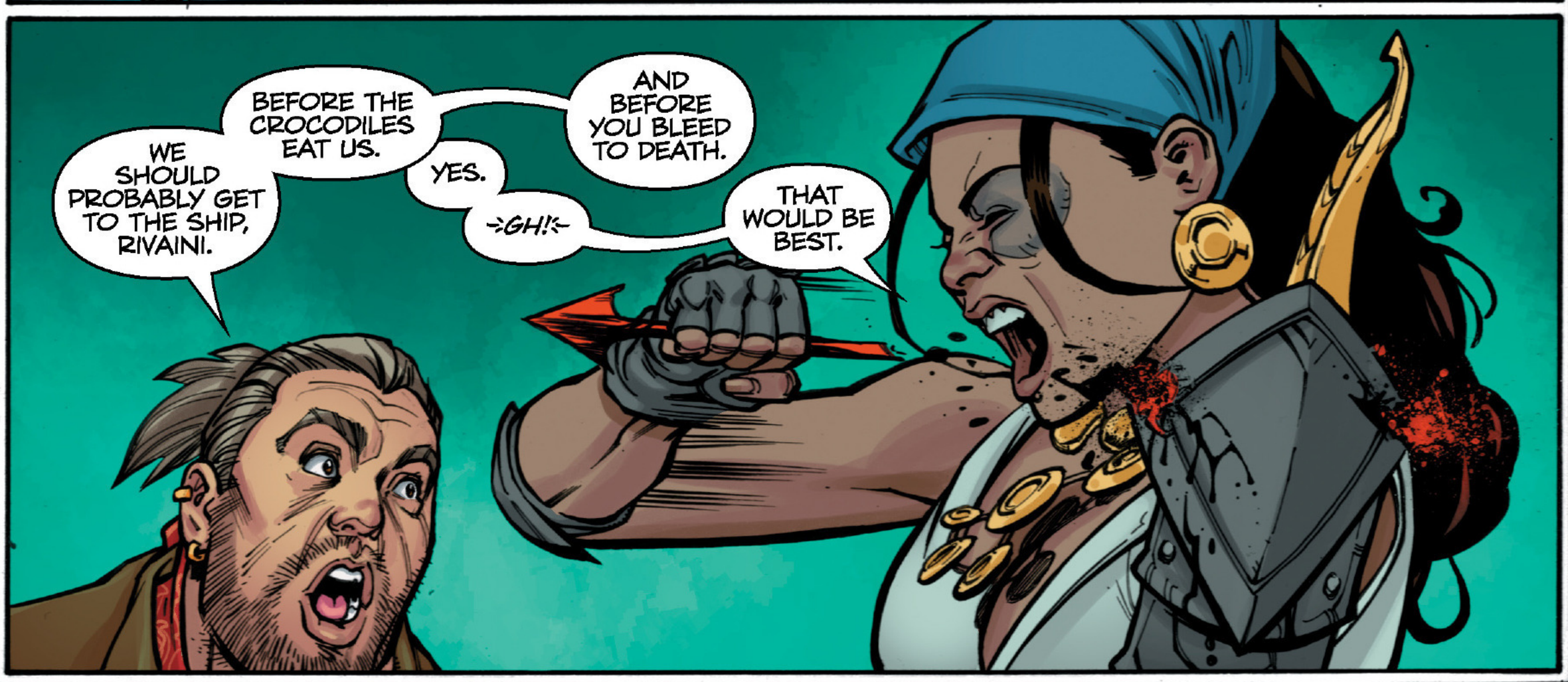
IF YOU WANT ME ALIVE, YOU LET ISABELA AND VARRIC GO.
THEN I SURRENDER.
DON'T EVEN THINK OF IT.

CLAUDIO'S A *WORM* AND WE'RE ALL STILL BREATHING.
I HAVEN'T HAD THIS MUCH FUN SINCE--*AH!*
SINCE YOU WERE BEING CHASED BY QUNARI?
I WAS THINKING... ANSELMO'S BACHELOR PARTY.

HUH. I *ACCEPT* YOUR TERMS, KING OF FERELDEN.
BUT *ISABELA* -- MAKE YOUR BED SOMEWHERE *FAR* BEYOND MY NOTICE.

ALISTAIR...

GO BACK TO FERELDEN.
FIND ARL TEAGAN -- HE'LL PAY YOU -- AND TELL HIM WHAT HAPPENED.
THANK YOU BOTH.


WE SHOULD PROBABLY GET TO THE SHIP, RIVAINI.
BEFORE THE CROCODILES EAT US.
YES.
AND BEFORE YOU BLEED TO DEATH.
-GH!-
THAT WOULD BE BEST.

WE'RE NOT GOING TO THE SHIP, ARE WE?
NOT UNTIL I SLIT CLAUDIO'S THROAT AND GET HIS PRISONER BACK.
I WAS HOPING YOU'D SAY THAT...

CHAPTER 5

YAVANA!

COME OUT OR SEND YOUR DAMNED DRAGON OUT!
I WOULDN'T GIVE HER IDEAS.

YOU!

WITCH!

ALISTAIR'S BEEN CAPTURED.

YOU NEED TO HELP US GET HIM *BACK.*

WHY WOULD I NEED TO INVOLVE MYSELF AT ALL?

BECAUSE THE PEOPLE WHO TOOK HIM ARE LOOKING FOR THIS...PLACE.

THEY ALREADY KNOW THE WAY, AND I EXPECT THEY WANT ALISTAIR AS A *SHIELD* AGAINST YOUR DRAGON.

THAT AND MORE, YES.

AND YOU'RE PLANNING TO, WHAT -- WAIT FOR THEM?

HARDLY YOUR CONCERN.

BESIDES, YOU CARE NOTHING FOR *MY* FATE.

SCREW THIS.
GET ON THE ROOF -- WE KNOW THEY'RE COMING, WE SET UP AN AMBUSH --
LET ME TRY.
I'VE MET YOUR MOTHER, AND I'VE MET MERCHANTS AND CON MEN WHO COULD FLEECE THE HORNS OFF A QUNARI.
I KNOW WHEN A PERSON WANTS TO STRIKE A DEAL.
KING MARIC MADE A BARGAIN, AND SO CAN WE.
NAME YOUR PRICE.
OH, CRUD.

WHAT?
NOT EVEN A BLOODSTAIN.
GO.
YOUR FRIEND NEEDS YOU.
YOU DIDN'T SAY WHAT YOU EXPECT IN RETURN.
YOU WILL DO YOUR PART.
GO.
HE'S NOT REALLY OUR FRIEND, YOU KNOW--
LET'S GET OUT WHILE WE CAN, SHALL WE?

...IF IT'S ANY COMFORT, I WAS *IMPRESSED* YOU CAME TO ANTIVA ALONE.

IT SHOWED *COURAGE*, IF NOT *INTELLECT*.

RIGHT-- BECAUSE YOU'RE THE *CLEVER* ONE.

YOU LURED ME ALL THE WAY OUT HERE TO GET INTO THAT GROVE?

I DID.

PITY YOU DIDN'T THINK TO JUST *KILL* THE DRAGON.

WE TOYED WITH THE NOTION OF *TRYING*--

--BUT THAT BEAUTY IS WHY WE'RE INTERESTED.

WHEN YOU SAY "*WE*"...YOU'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT THE CROW ASSASSINS.

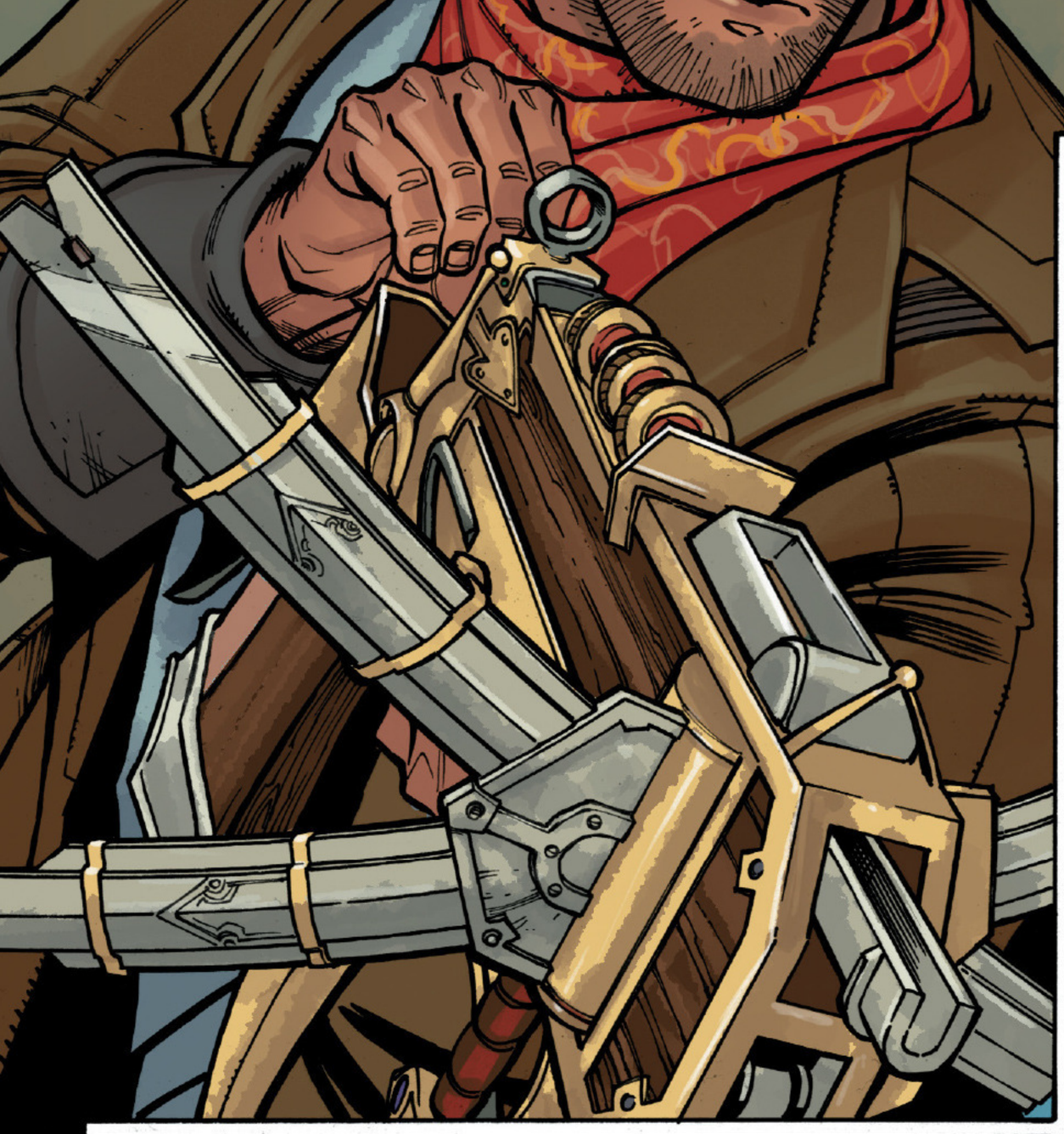
WE ALL HAVE OUR PATRONS.

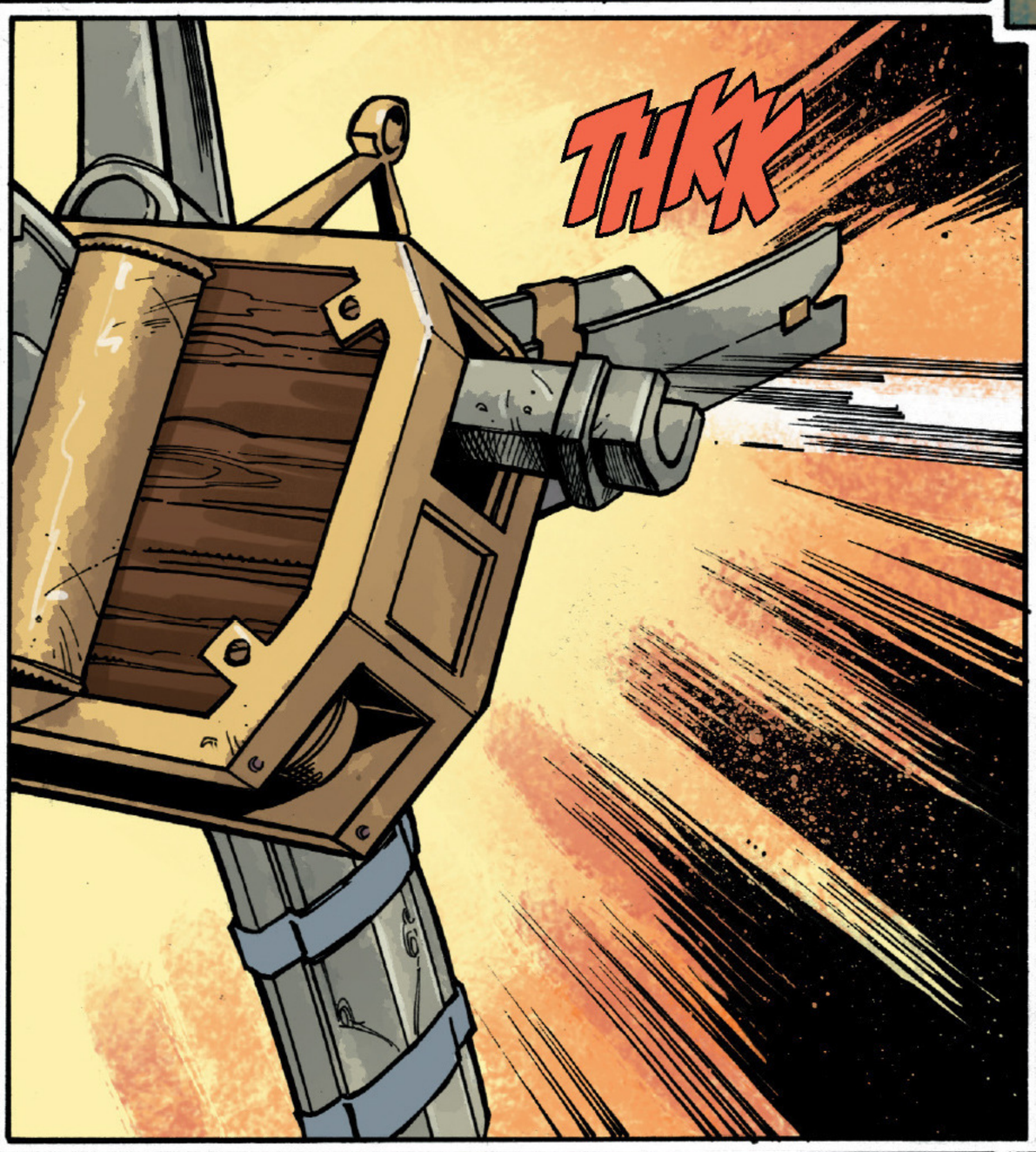
PROVE MORE TOLERABLE THAN YOUR *FATHER*, AND I MAY EVEN TELL YOU ABOUT MINE.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT MARIC?

WHAT *HAPPENED* AFTER HE CAME HERE?

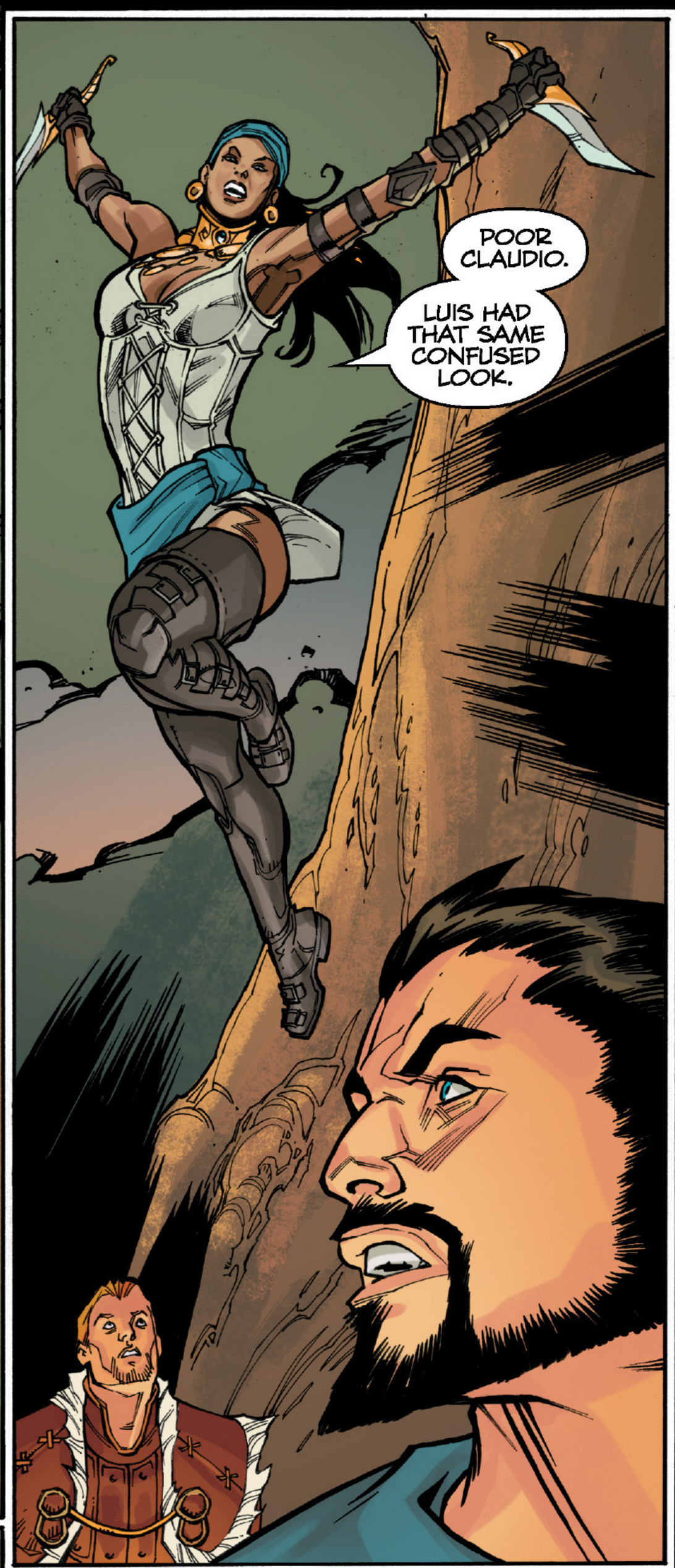
THE DWARF!
FIND THE DWARF!
YOU WANTED ME ALIVE.
NOW YOU HAVE TO TRY TO KEEP ME.




THKK

BIANCA SAYS HELLO.

IDIOTS!
MAINTAIN A PERIMETER!


POOR CLAUDIO.
LUIS HAD THAT SAME CONFUSED LOOK.

YOU DON'T DESERVE TO SPEAK HIS *NAME.*
HE WAS *MY* HUSBAND, NOT YOURS.
PITY, TOO -- I'D HAVE LOVED TO SEE *YOU* LOCKED IN HIS "*EVENING GALLERY*" FOR A FEW DAYS.

DIDN'T I TELL YOU TO GO?
SO WHAT IF YOU DID?
YOU'RE NOT *MY* KING.

TRYING TO TRADE UP, THEN?
LUIS COULD PAY FOR YOUR WINE AND YOUR SILKS, BUT THIS MAN COULD GIVE YOU A WHOLE COUNTRY.
STAY CLOSE AND SHOW SOME FLESH--
SHUT UP AND FIGHT.
ALWAYS THE HYPOCRITE.
HOW MANY NIGHTS DID YOU WEAR THAT SHY LITTLE SMILE, WHISPERING MEEKLY IN YOUR HUSBAND'S EAR?

THEN WHEN HE ASKS YOU TO ENTERTAIN HIS FRIENDS, YOU DECIDE HE'S NOT DOTING ENOUGH?
YOU WERE LUCKY TO BE LUIS'S PLAYTHING -- NO ONE ELSE WOULD HAVE LIFTED YOU OUT OF THAT FILTH YOU CALLED A HOME!
IF YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE TOO GOOD FOR HIM, YOU SHOULD HAVE CRAWLED BACK TO THE SEWERS ON YOUR WEDDING DAY --
-- NOT BEDDED AND BETRAYED HIM TO BECOME WHORE OF THE EASTERN SHORE!
YOU'RE RIGHT -- I SHOULD HAVE.
I'VE CHANGED A LOT SINCE THEN.

LAST WORDS?
GHKK--
ALL RIGHT, THEN.

DON'T!

YOU KILLED HIM.
WELL, I DIDN'T LIKE HIM VERY MUCH.
I HADN'T NOTICED.
BUT HE HAD ANSWERS ABOUT MARIC.
I ASSURE YOU--
--THE TRUTH IS NEVER OUT OF REACH.
IT'S TOO LATE NOW.
YOU BELIEVE SO?

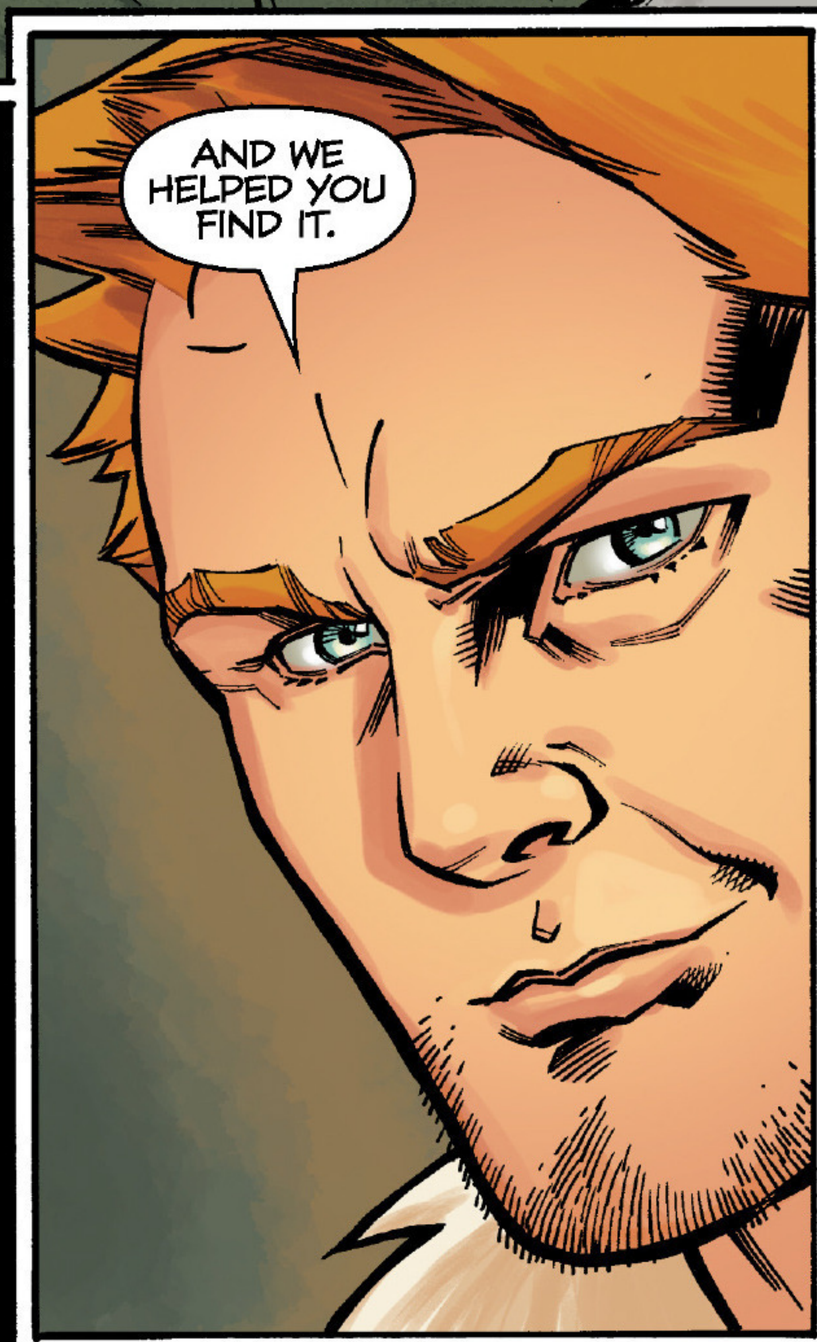
CHAPTER 6
UGH.
FROM NOW ON, NO MORE GAMES OF CHASE THE DWARF.
YOU'RE NOT JUST A DISTRACTION, VARRIC.
YOU'RE USEFUL FOR MORE THAN LURING AWAY GUARDS --
-- WHILE EVERYTHING MEMORABLE HAPPENS SOMEPLACE ELSE?
GLAD TO SEE YOU'RE ALL RIGHT.
YOU ALMOST MISSED THE FUN.
EVIDENTLY, WE'RE GOING TO ASK CLAUDIO HOW IT FEELS TO BE STABBED IN THE CHEST.

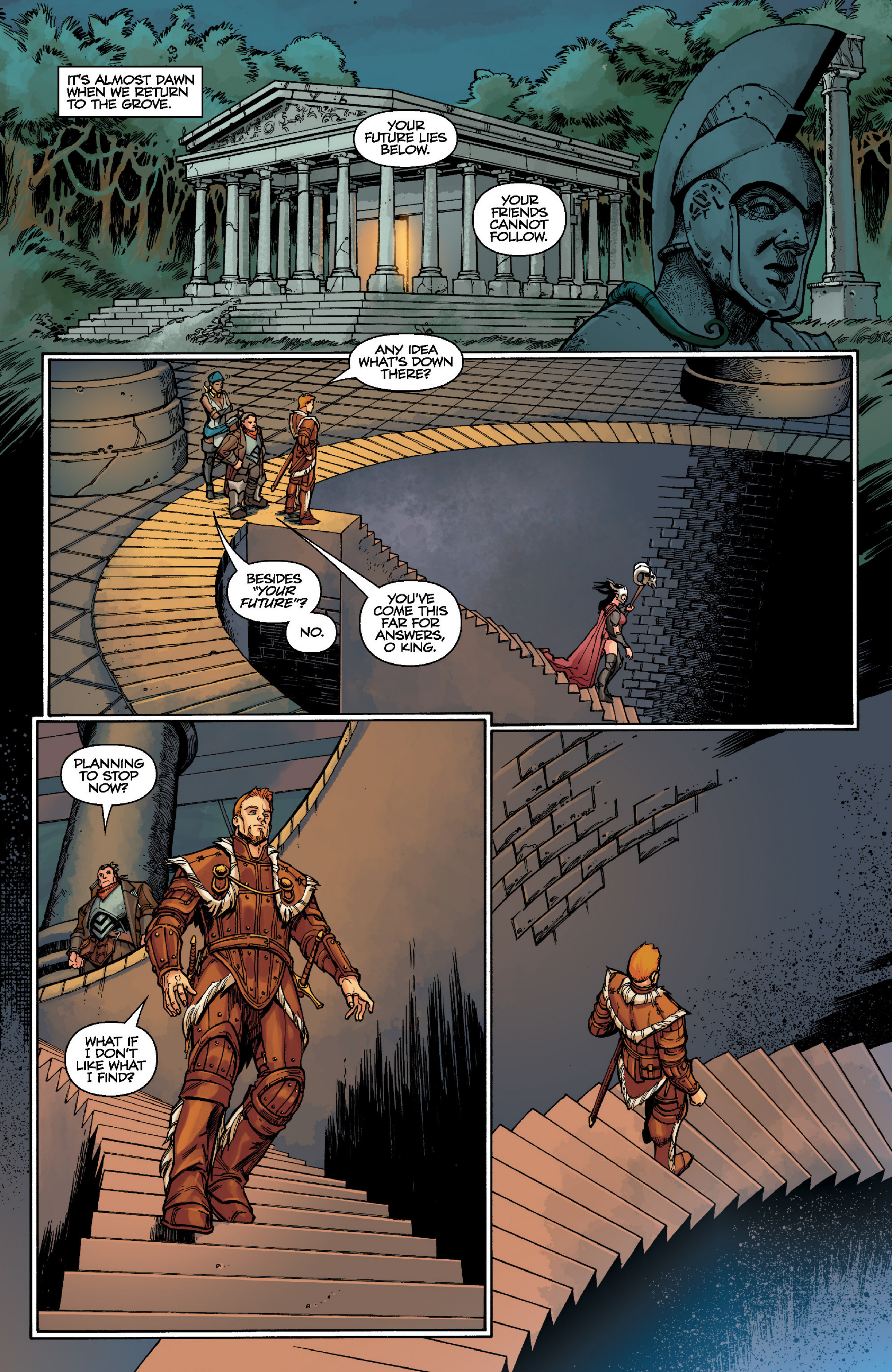
WE BEGIN.
HIS SPIRIT LINGERS IN THE FADE.
WHO ARE YOU?
I AM... CLAUDIO VALISTI.
PRINCE OF ANTIVA AND THIRD TALON OF THE ANTIVAN CROWS.
I AM DEAD?
YES, YOU ARE.
TELL ME THE NAME OF YOUR MASTER, PRINCE CLAUDIO VALISTI OF THE ORDER OF CROWS.
I...CANNOT.
YOU CAN AND YOU WILL.
TELL ME HIS NAME, PRINCE CLAUDIO VALISTI.
TELL ME, OR I WILL PIN YOUR SPIRIT TO THIS ROTTING BODY FOR ETERNITY.
TELL ME, OR I WILL LET MAGGOTS EAT YOUR ESSENCE AS THEY EAT YOUR FLESH, AND PROTECT ONLY ENOUGH OF YOUR SOUL TO KEEP YOU AWARE.
I...
YOUR MASTER'S NAME!
AURELIAN TITUS.

WHO'S AURELIAN TITUS?

FOR NOW?

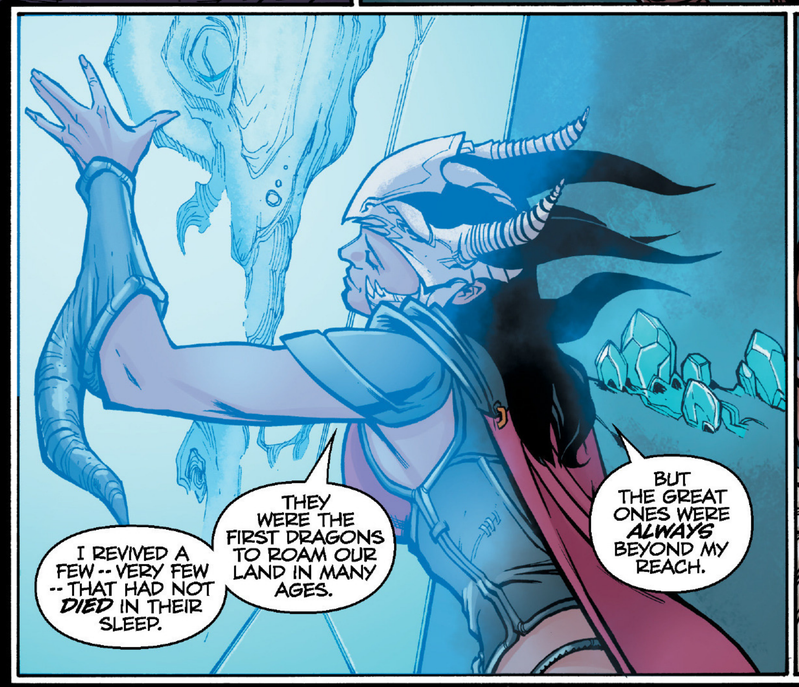
A NAME -- BUT IT IS A NAME I HAVE SOUGHT FOR A VERY LONG TIME.



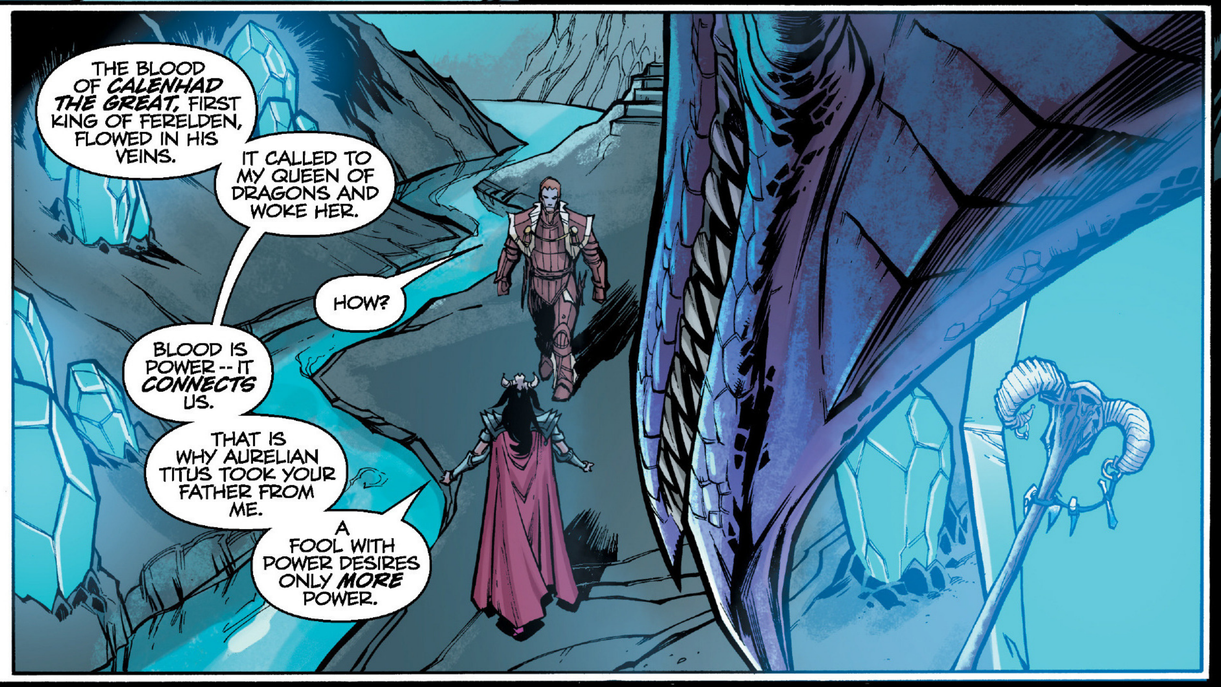

IT'S ALMOST DAWN WHEN WE RETURN TO THE GROVE.
YOUR FUTURE LIES BELOW.
YOUR FRIENDS CANNOT FOLLOW.
ANY IDEA WHAT'S DOWN THERE?
BESIDES "YOUR FUTURE"?
NO.
YOU'VE COME THIS FAR FOR ANSWERS, O KING.
PLANNING TO STOP NOW?
WHAT IF I DON'T LIKE WHAT I FIND?

HRRRRRRRR
IT IS PERMITTED.
TONIGHT, AND ONLY TONIGHT.

WHERE ARE WE?
THE HALL OF SLEEPERS.
WHEN DRAGONS WERE NEARLY EXTINGUISHED FROM THIS WORLD, THE BUILDERS OF THE TEMPLE CALLED TO THE FEW THAT REMAINED.
THE DRAGONS THAT CAME WOULD REST HERE FOR GENERATIONS --
--UNTIL AWAKENED BY POWER.


I REVIVED A FEW -- VERY FEW -- THAT HAD NOT DIED IN THEIR SLEEP.
THEY WERE THE FIRST DRAGONS TO ROAM OUR LAND IN MANY AGES.
BUT THE GREAT ONES WERE ALWAYS BEYOND MY REACH.

MARIC CHANGED THAT.


THE BLOOD OF CALENHAD THE GREAT, FIRST KING OF FERELDEN, FLOWED IN HIS VEINS.
IT CALLED TO MY QUEEN OF DRAGONS AND WOKE HER.
HOW?
BLOOD IS POWER -- IT CONNECTS US.
THAT IS WHY AURELIAN TITUS TOOK YOUR FATHER FROM ME.
A FOOL WITH POWER DESIRES ONLY MORE POWER.

YOUR HEART BEATS WITH THE OLD BLOOD, AS WELL.
WHERE DO YOU THINK IT COMES FROM?
IT SINGS OF A TIME WHEN DRAGONS RULED THE SKIES.
A TIME BEFORE THE VEIL, BEFORE THE MYSTERIES WERE FORGOTTEN.
CAN YOU HEAR IT?
YOU SEE YOUR BLOOD AS A CURSE, YOUR CROWN AS A BURDEN.
USE THEM NOW TO CLAIM YOUR FREEDOM.
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?
AWAKEN THE LAST OF THE GREAT ONES, AS YOUR FATHER WAS MEANT TO.
ABSOLVE HIM OF HIS OATH, AND WE WILL SEARCH FOR AURELIAN TITUS TOGETHER.
WE WILL FIND YOUR FATHER, AND HE CAN RELIEVE YOU OF YOUR CROWN.
YOUR LIFE WILL BE YOURS AGAIN.
WHY IS IT ALWAYS A RITUAL?

YOU AND MORRIGAN AND FLEMETH...ALL YOU DO IS MANIPULATE AND LIE.
THAT IS OUR CRAFT, BUT NOT OUR PURPOSE.
MANKIND DESTROYS WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING, YET I PRESERVE.
WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE?
JUSTICE.

YOU TOOK MARIC FROM ME.

FROM MY BROTHER.

YOU TOOK HIM FROM FERELDEN.

EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED TO MY COUNTRY IS BECAUSE OF YOU.

HHRRRRRRRRRRR

GOING TO EAT ME?

I DIDN'T THINK SO.

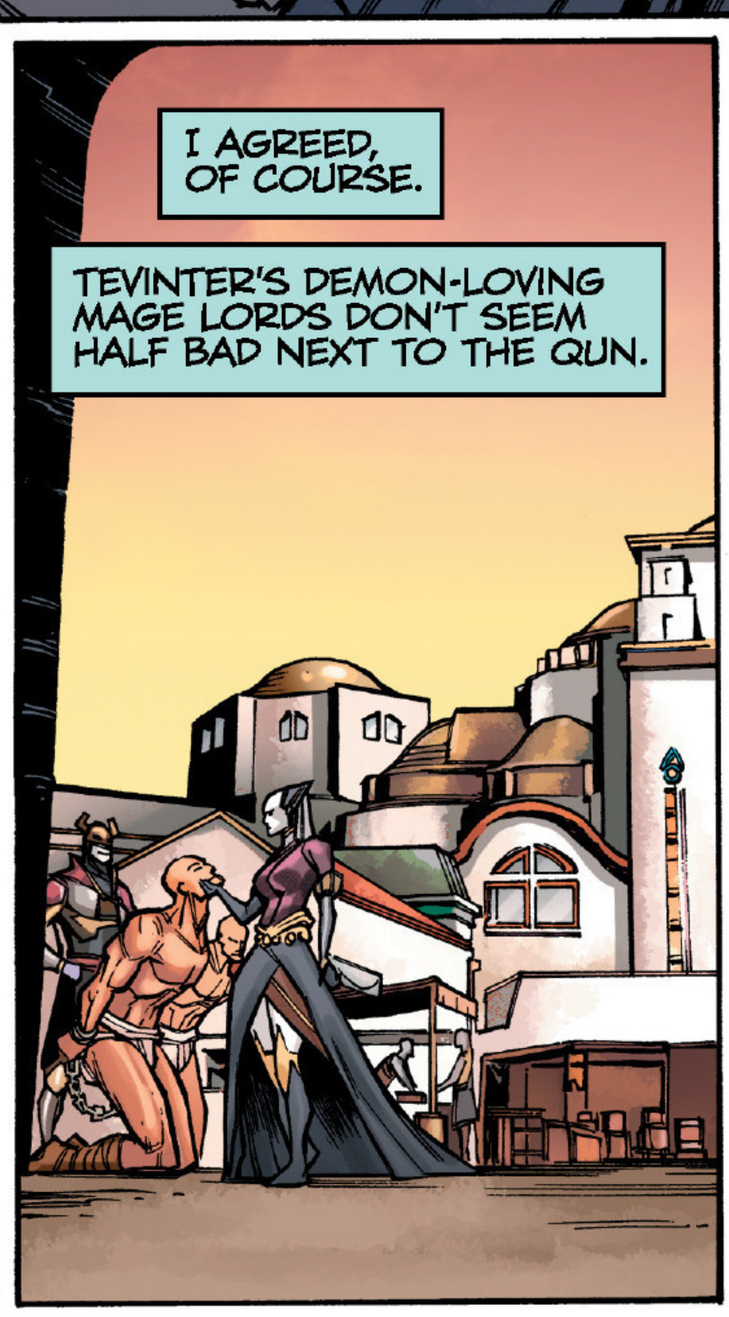
I TAKE IT THINGS WENT WELL?
ARE YOU OKAY?
NO.
I KILLED HER.
THAT'S IT, THEN?
IT'S NOT.
I'M TIRED OF BEING A PAWN, VARRIC.
I'M GOING TO FIND AURELIAN TITUS AND I'M GOING TO KILL HIM, TOO.
HE'S EARNED THAT MUCH.

WHEN THAT'S DONE, I'M GOING TO FIND MARIC.
AND THEN I'M GOING HOME...TO BE KING.
IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU SAID THAT.
I SHOULD ASK FOR A SECOND SHIP.
OR A TITLE.
YOU DO INTEND TO PAY US TO STICK AROUND...?
LET ME SEE WHAT'S LEFT IN THE TREASURY.
MY NAME IS ALISTAIR THEIRIN, AND I'M KING OF FERELDEN.
LONG LIVE THE KING, LONG MAY HE REIGN! AND SO FORTH.
PRAY TO THE MAKER HE DOESN'T DO SOMETHING STUPID...
THE END

ILLUSTRATION BY
ANTHONY PALUMBO

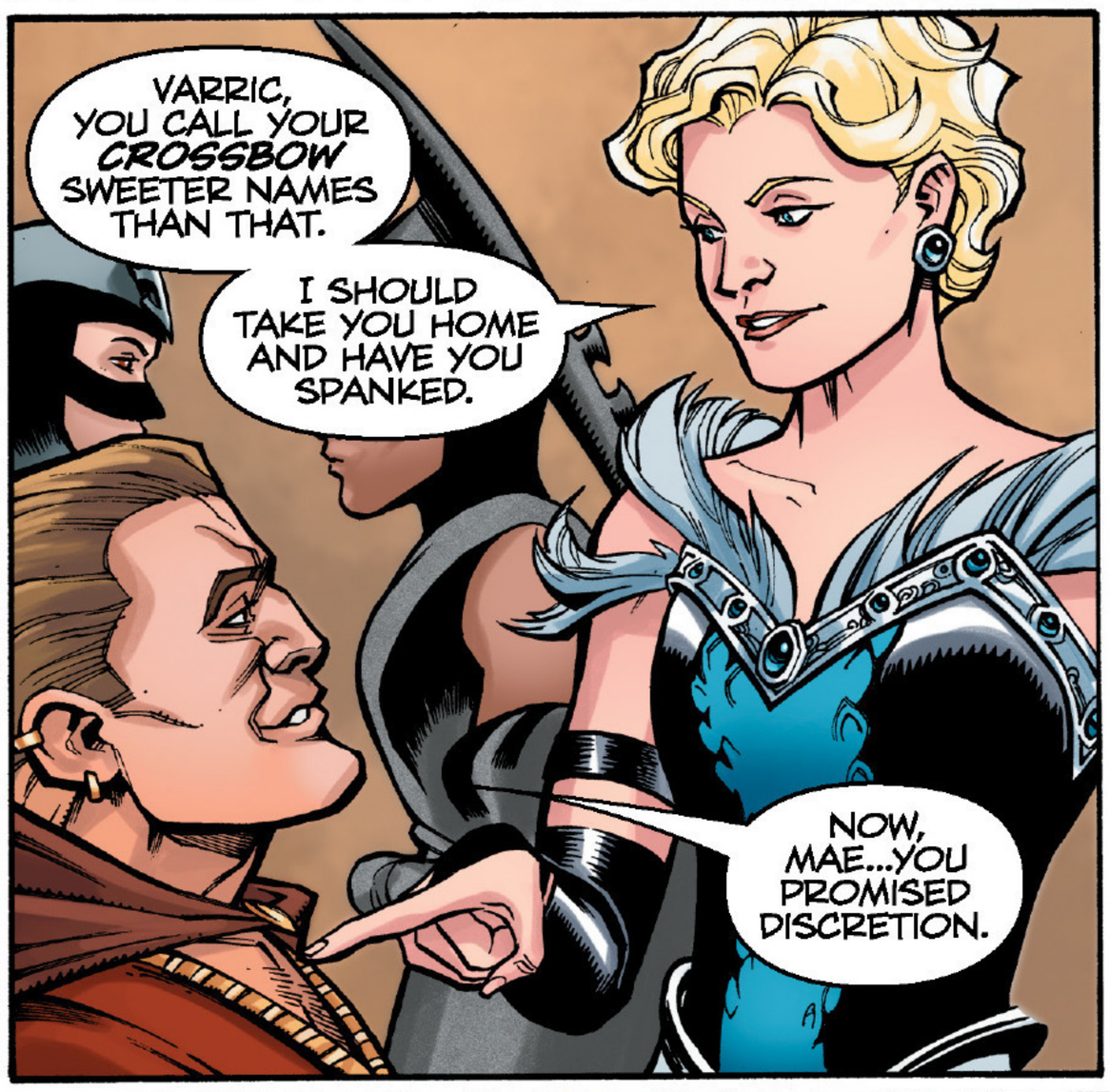
CHAPTER 1

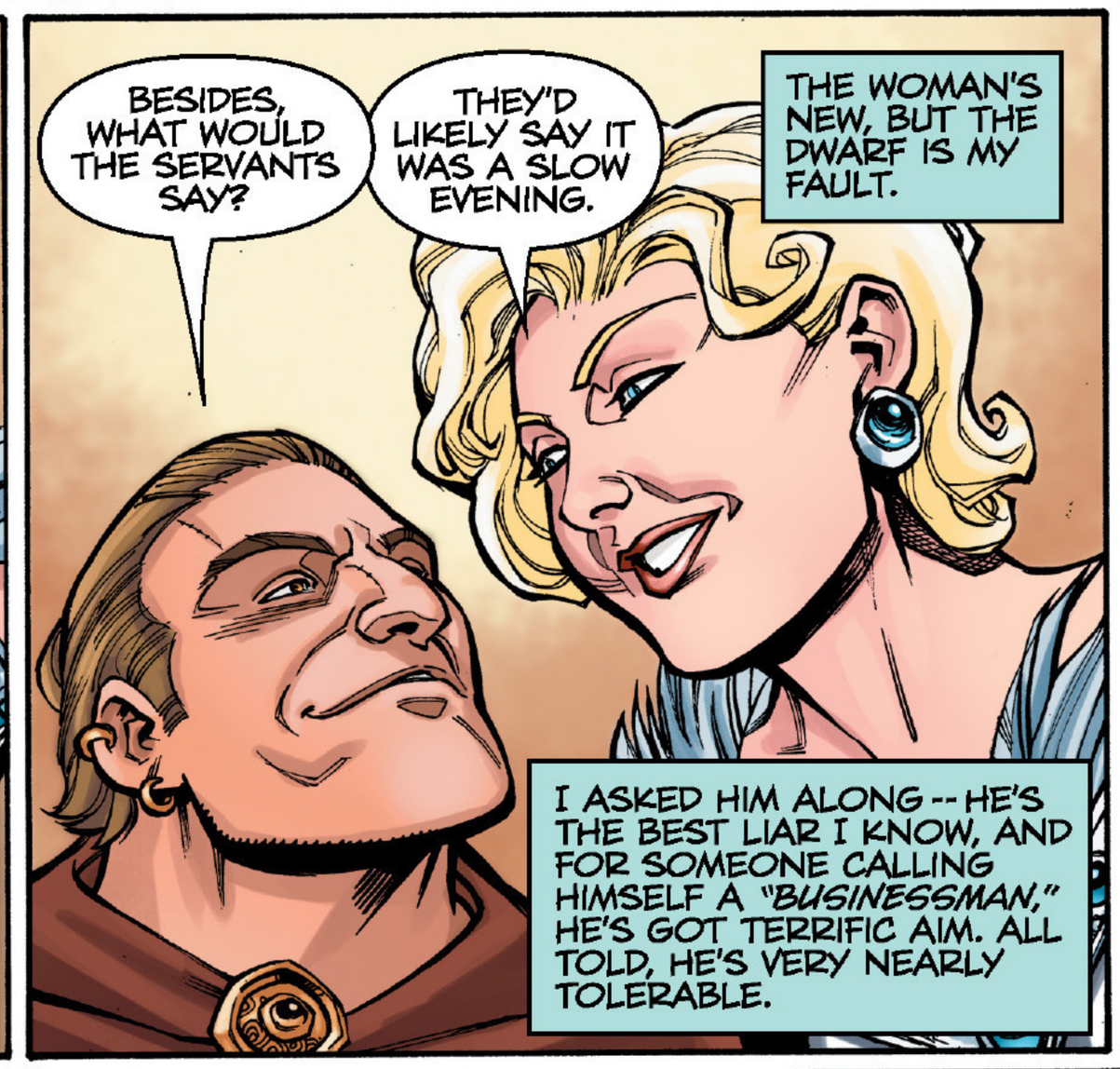
WE CAME TO TEVINTER -- BETTER KNOWN AS THE ARSE END OF ALL NIGHTMARES -- TO MURDER A MAN.



NO TROUBLE IN SIGHT, UNLESS YOU COUNT THE WHOLE DAMNED CITY.
KEEP WATCH, AND IF OUR MEN SIGNAL --
-- WE'LL GET WORD TO YOU.
GET WORD TO *KING ALISTAIR.*
WE'RE HERE ON HIS COIN, AND HE'S LIKE A LOST PUPPY AWAY FROM HIS HOMELAND.
ENJOY THE BALL, THEN, CAPTAIN.
KILL ME NOW.

THINGS I INSTANTLY HATE: THE MAGISTERS, THE SLAVE TENDERS, THE DRESS CODE, THE OVERSEASONED MEAT.
(BECAUSE OF COURSE IF YOU CAN'T SMELL HOW EXPENSIVE THE SPICES ARE, WHAT'S THE POINT?)
THINGS I WORRY ABOUT: NO WEAPONS IN SIGHT, BUT EVERYONE IS ARMED.
ANGRY MAGES WILL MELT OUR EYES WITH WITCH FIRE IF THINGS GO SOUTH.
LET ME INTRODUCE YOU -- HE FOUND MY HOUSE SLAVES...
ANY WORD FROM TAL ARAMIS?
...EVER BEEN TO VYRANTIUM?
ONE HUNDRED DEAD QUNARI, BUT OF COURSE THEY KEEP ATTACKING.
A CONVERT TO THE QUN, ON MY OWN PROPERTY!
THINGS I FIND PROMISING: THE WINE'S PROBABLY NOT POISONED, WHICH COULD LIVEN UP THE NIGHT...
MAE, YOU BEAUTIFUL MINX!





ALISTAIR, THIS IS MAEVARIS TILANI -- WIDOW TO MY COUSIN THOROLD.

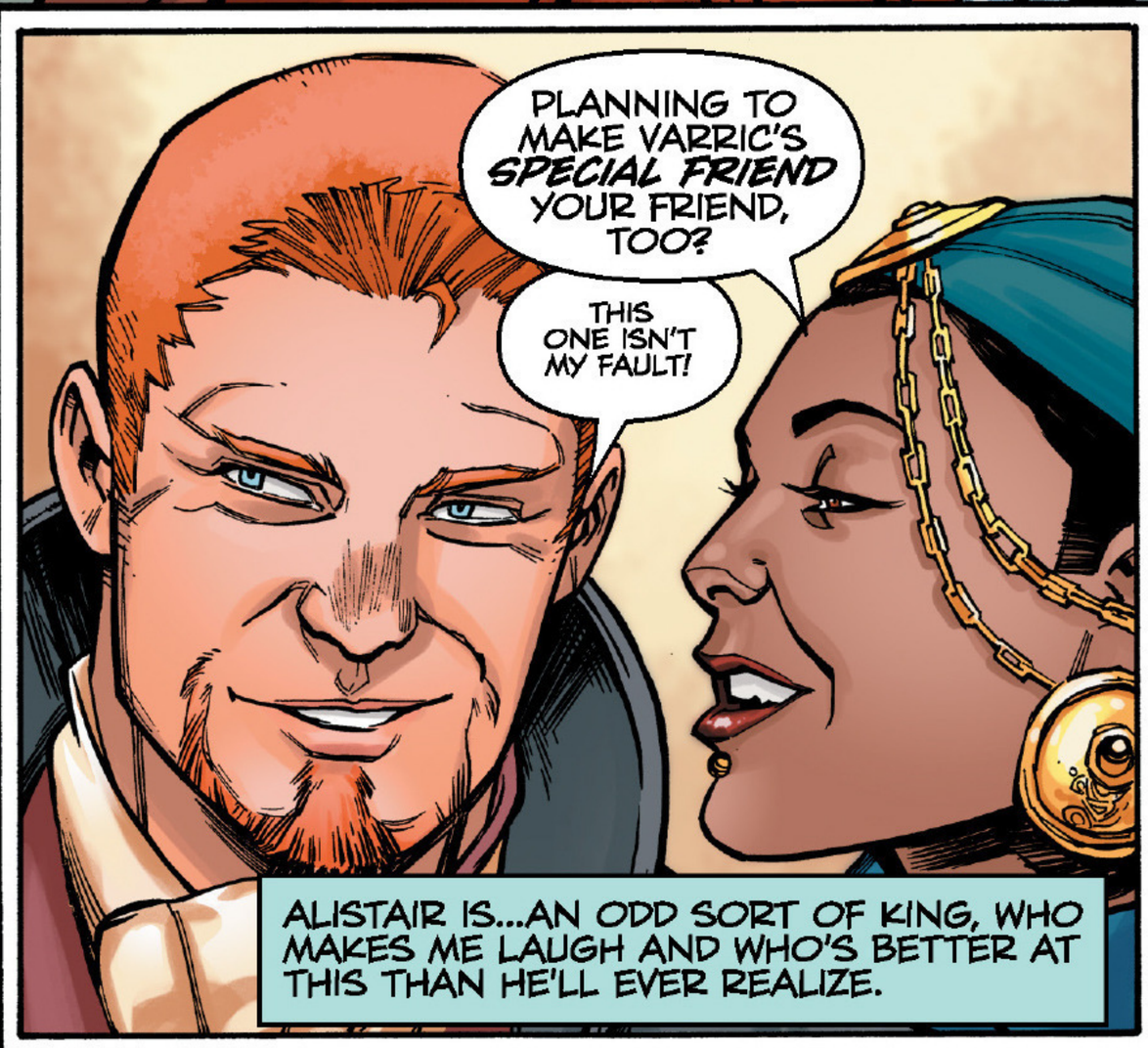
KING OR NOT, YOU'VE GOT HANDS LIKE A STONEMASON.

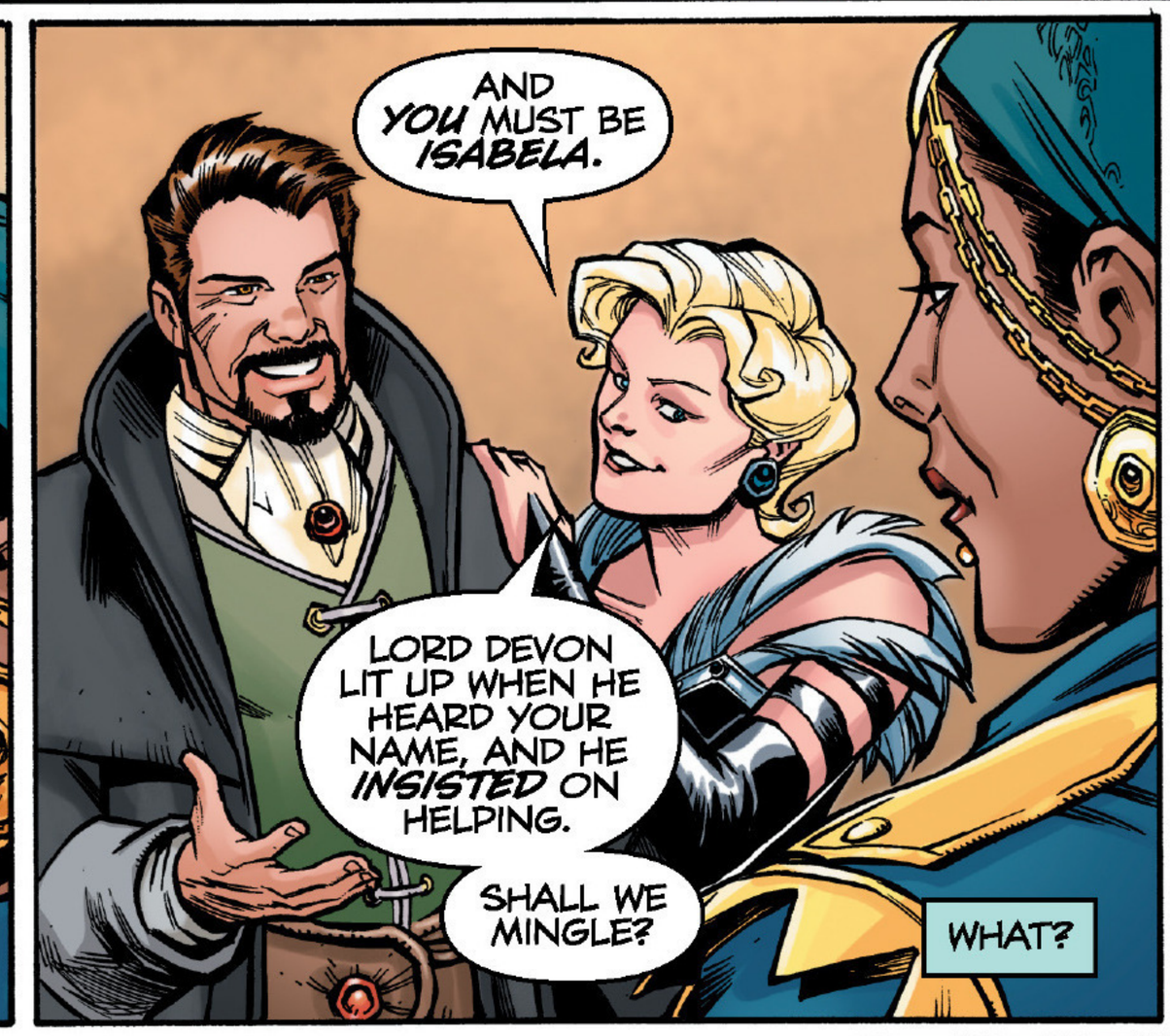
I'D *LOVE* TO SEE WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH THEM.

IT'S...A PLEASURE TO MEET YOU, MAGISTER.

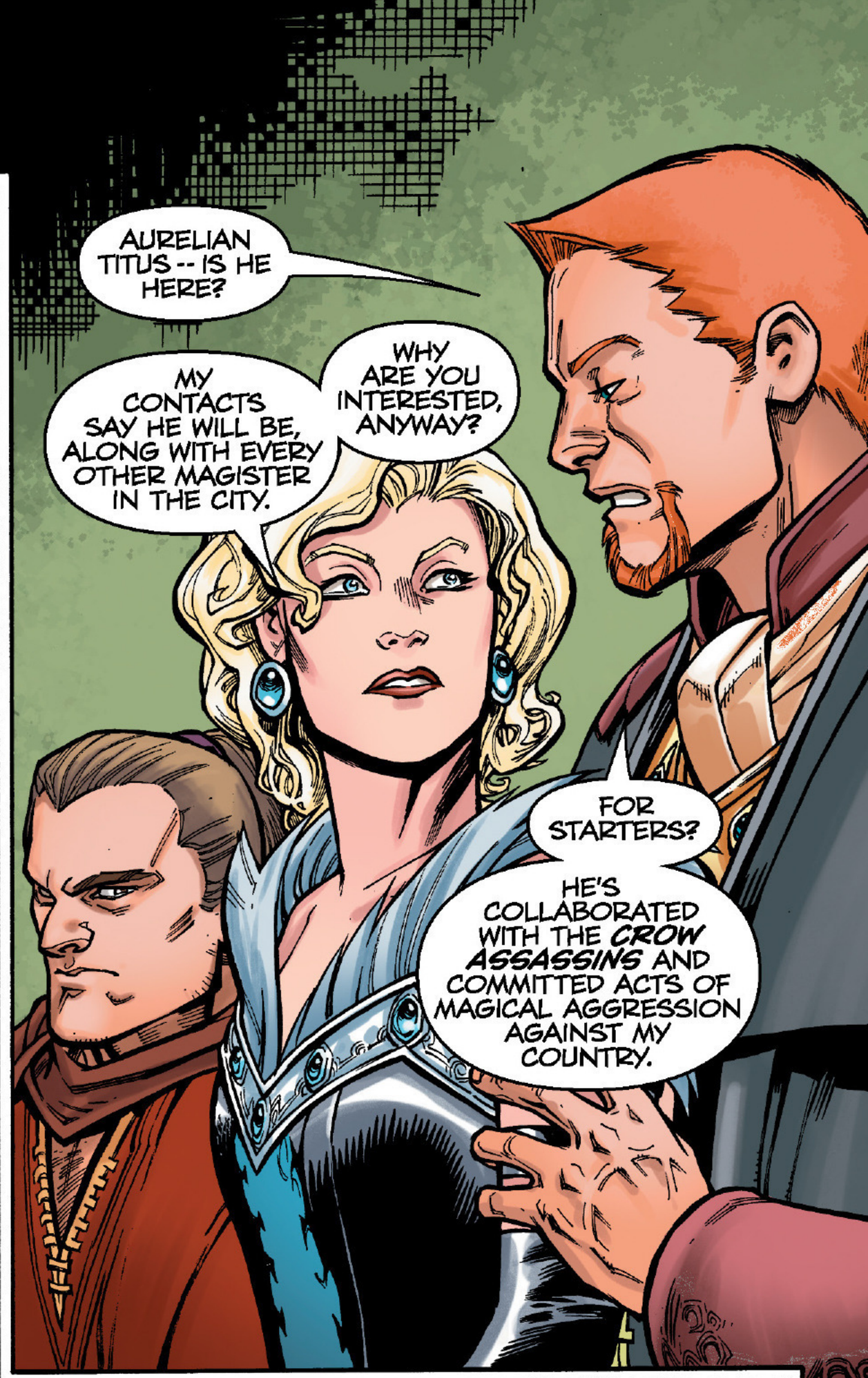
SHE'S REALLY A MAGISTER?

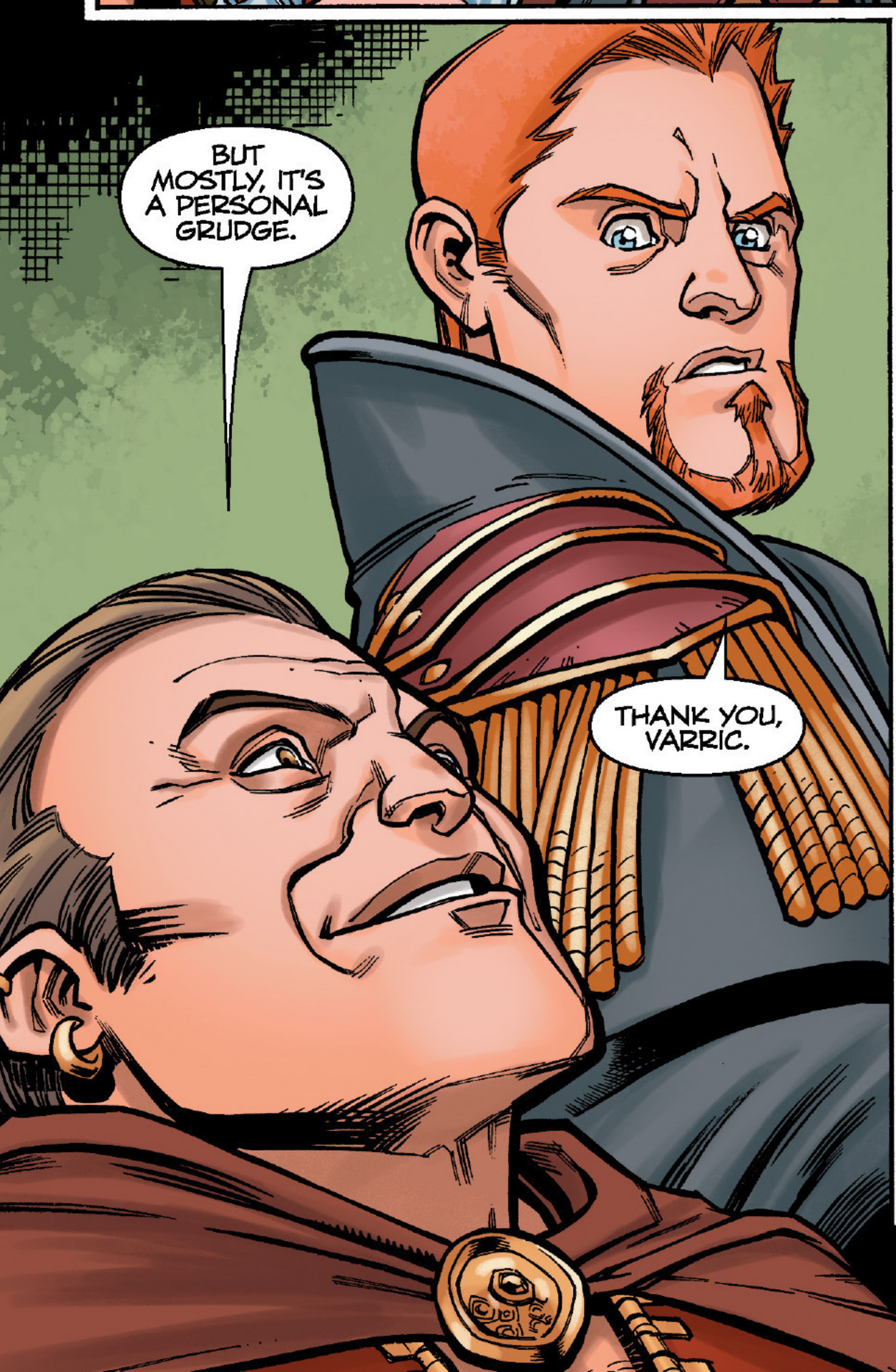
RECOGNIZED BY THE IMPERIAL SENATE.



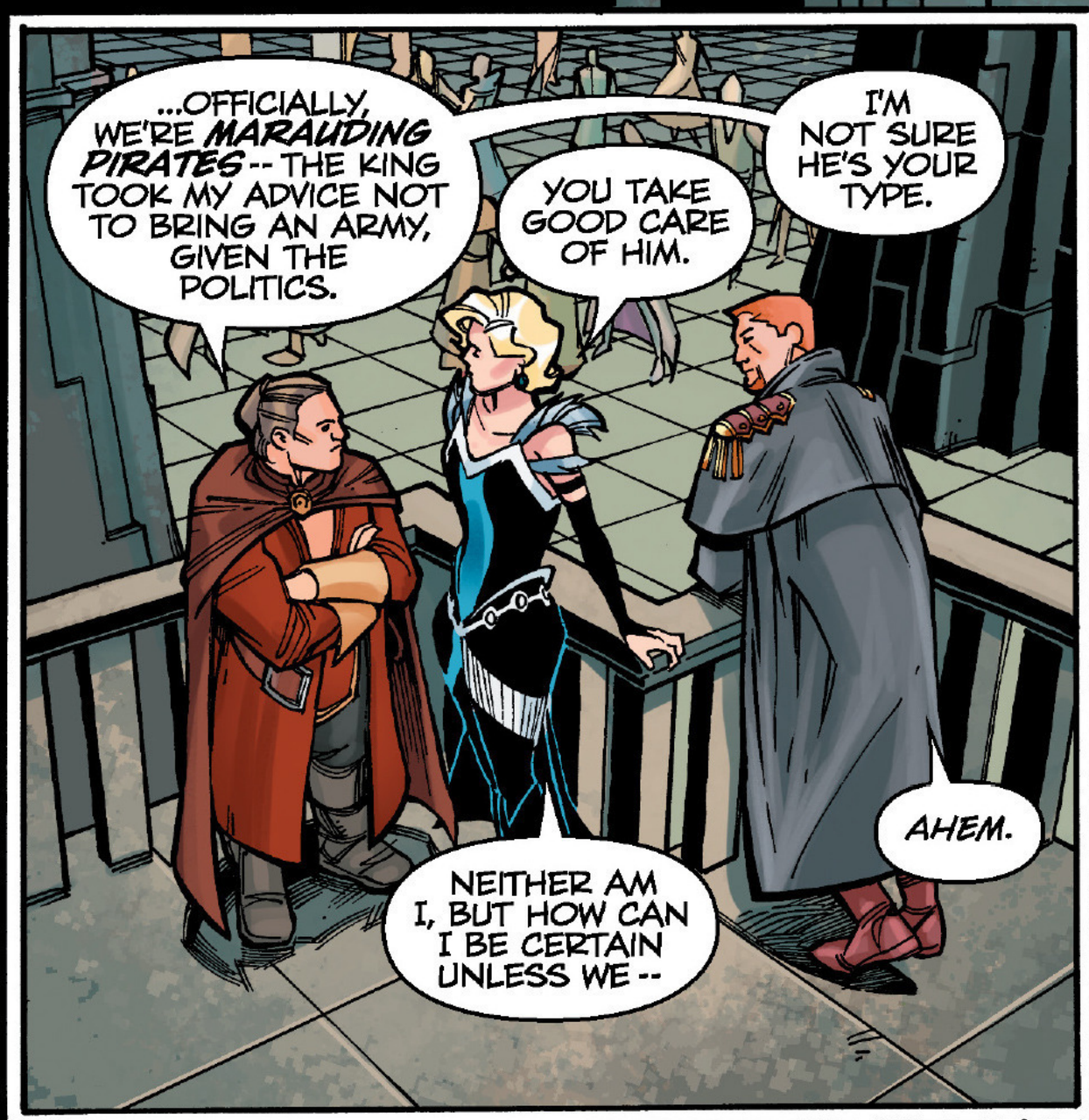


I DIDN'T MEAN TO SURPRISE YOU.
ESCORT FOR A KING NOW?
JUST TRANSPORT AND SECURITY, OR --
DON'T. SAY. A. WORD.

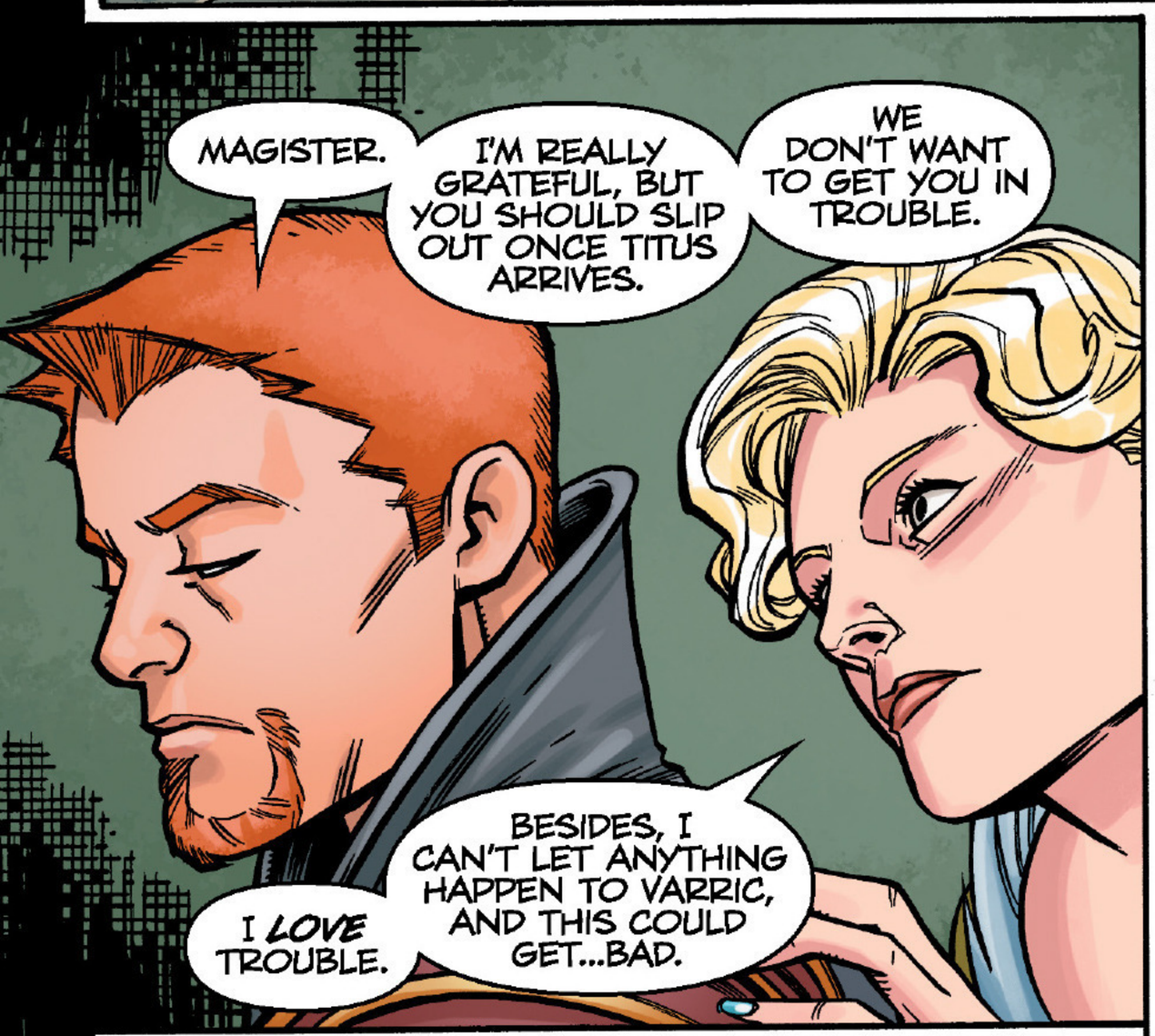

AURELIAN TITUS -- IS HE HERE?
MY CONTACTS SAY HE WILL BE, ALONG WITH EVERY OTHER MAGISTER IN THE CITY.
WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED, ANYWAY?
FOR STARTERS?
HE'S COLLABORATED WITH THE *CROW ASSASSINS* AND COMMITTED ACTS OF MAGICAL AGGRESSION AGAINST MY COUNTRY.


BUT MOSTLY, IT'S A PERSONAL GRUDGE.
THANK YOU, VARRIC.

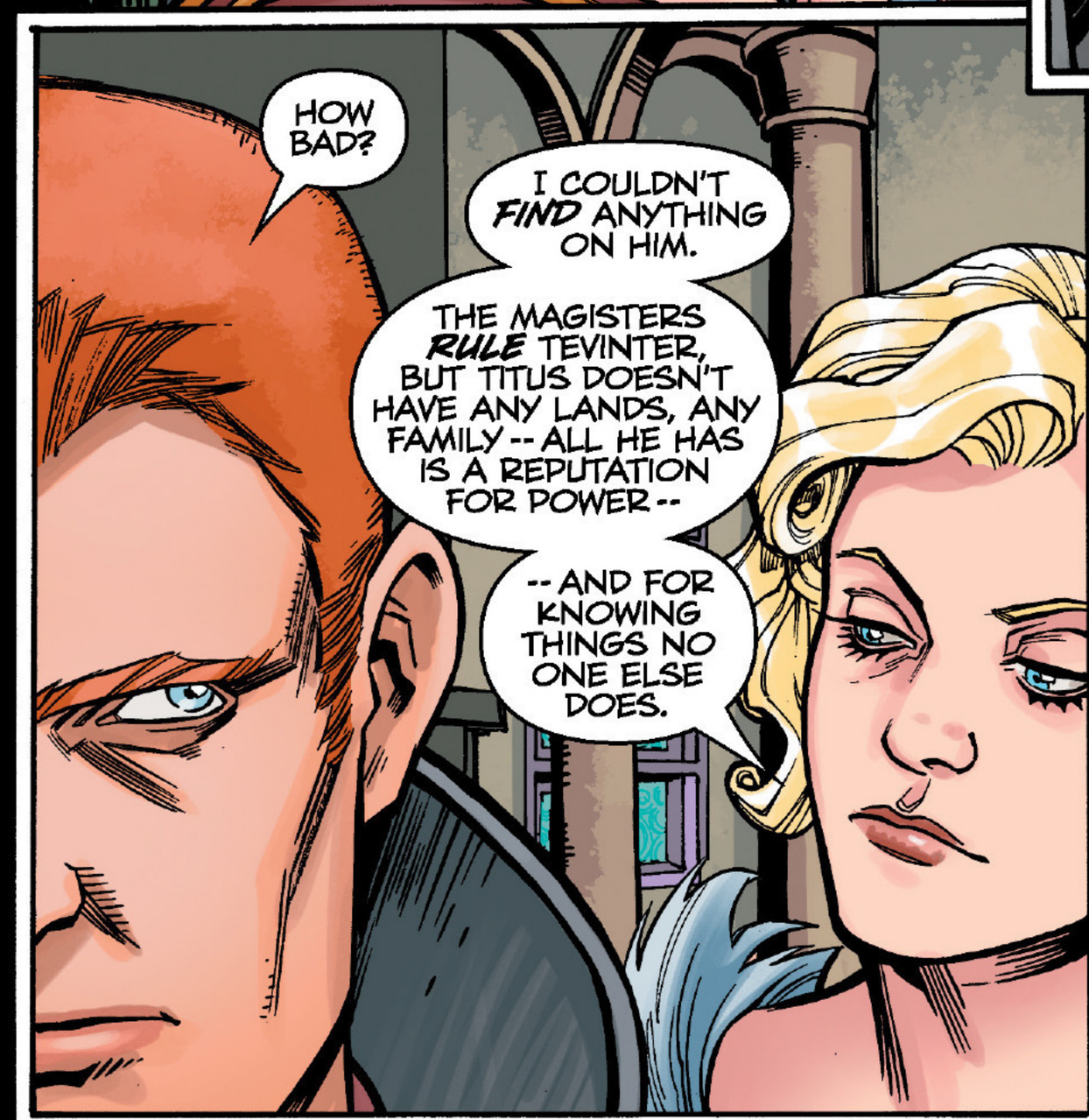
...MAE ASKED ME TO WATCH FOR YOUR SHIP AND KEEP IT OFF THE REGISTRY.
I DIDN'T THINK YOU WERE STILL ALIVE, TO BE HONEST.
I'M ALIVE.
DON'T MISTAKE ME, I'M VERY *GLAD*.


...OFFICIALLY, WE'RE MARAUDING PIRATES -- THE KING TOOK MY ADVICE NOT TO BRING AN ARMY, GIVEN THE POLITICS.
YOU TAKE GOOD CARE OF HIM.
I'M NOT SURE HE'S YOUR TYPE.
NEITHER AM I, BUT HOW CAN I BE CERTAIN UNLESS WE --
AHEM.

...MAYBE AFTER THIS, WE CAN CATCH UP OVER DRINKS?
YOU'RE AWFULLY QUIET.
I'M IMAGINING YOU AS A LEGLESS COCKROACH, ROLLING IN YOUR FILTH AND WAITING TO DIE.


MAGISTER.
I'M REALLY GRATEFUL, BUT YOU SHOULD SLIP OUT ONCE TITUS ARRIVES.
WE DON'T WANT TO GET YOU IN TROUBLE.
I LOVE TROUBLE.
BESIDES, I CAN'T LET ANYTHING HAPPEN TO VARRIC, AND THIS COULD GET...BAD.

...YOU OWE ME!
HOW WOULD YOU LIKE IT IF I TOLD YOUR KING ABOUT THE VENEFICATION SEA?
NOTHING HAPPENED THERE, DEVON.


HOW BAD?
I COULDN'T FIND ANYTHING ON HIM.
THE MAGISTERS RULE TEVINTER, BUT TITUS DOESN'T HAVE ANY LANDS, ANY FAMILY -- ALL HE HAS IS A REPUTATION FOR POWER --
-- AND FOR KNOWING THINGS NO ONE ELSE DOES.

NOTHING HAPPENED.
YOU UNDERSTAND?
YES.
THEN WALK AWAY.

WHAT DID I MISS?
IS THE MAGISTER POINTING OUT HER SLAVES?
EVERYONE HAS SLAVES IN TEVINTER, DARLING--
KAFFAS!
HE'S EARLY.
MAGISTER TITUS.
IS THE QUNARI ARISHOK DEFEATED?
MAGISTER TITUS.
YOUR PRESENCE HONORS US.
MAGISTER TITUS.
BENEATH THE CITY OF KIRKWALL, BELOW WHERE THE RAT CATCHERS PISS ON STONES TO MARK THEIR *TERRITORY*, THERE ARE RUINS.
VARRIC AND I HAVE BEEN THERE, AND WE DON'T *TALK* ABOUT IT, AND I CAN ONLY REMEMBER IT LIKE A SWEAT-STAINED BAD DREAM --
-- THE KIND WHERE EVERY CHOICE YOU MAKE IS *WRONG*, AND YOU'RE WAITING FOR SOMETHING TO REACH FROM THE SHADOWS AND PLUCK OUT YOUR EYES.
BEING HERE NOW IS LIKE BEING UNDERNEATH KIRKWALL AGAIN.
I HATE TEVINTER.

SPREAD OUT AND BE READY.
YOU'RE SURE--
NOW.
AURELIAN TITUS?
YES?
DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?
NO.
FUNNY, THAT.
YOU TRIED HARD ENOUGH TO GET YOUR HANDS ON ME.
YOU WEREN'T AS LUCKY AS YOU WERE WITH MY *FATHER.*
AH.
TAINTED SCION OF CALENHAD.
THE CIRCLE OF BLOOD COMPLETE.
KING ALISTAIR OF FERELDEN.
WELCOME TO TEVINTER.
STOP THAT.
I WANT TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO KING MARIC.

I SEE.
FALL.
I'D REALLY RATHER NOT.
AARAH!

HE IS A TEMPLAR!
SEIZE HIM!
MANAVERIS DRACONA!
HE'S GETTING AWAY!
FIGHT FIRST, THEN CHASE!

IT'S FUNNY HOW MANY PARTIES I GO TO END UP LIKE THIS.
I DON'T THINK THAT'S FUNNY.
THIS ISN'T YOUR FIGHT, MAGISTER TILANI!
OUR MASTER HAS NO QUARREL WITH YOU.
IT DOES MEAN FEWER INVITATIONS.
SO HOW'D YOU DO THAT THING WITH TITUS...?
I USED TO BE A TEMPLAR -- FIGHTING MAGES IS WHAT WE DO.
AFTER THE TELLARI SWAMPS, I THOUGHT I'D GET BACK IN PRACTICE.
I PROMISED THESE PEOPLE MY PROTECTION.
I AM A MAGISTER, AND I STAND BY MY WORD.
HURRY IT UP, MAE!

THE THINGS YOU LEARN ABOUT PEOPLE...
YOU'RE A WHORE, AND YOU'LL DIE LIKE ONE.
WHAT?
DAMNATION -- WE'RE RUNNING LOW.
WE NEED ONE ALIVE.
GOT IT!

REMIND ME NEVER TO MAKE YOU ANGRY.
GOOD ADVICE FOR ANYONE.

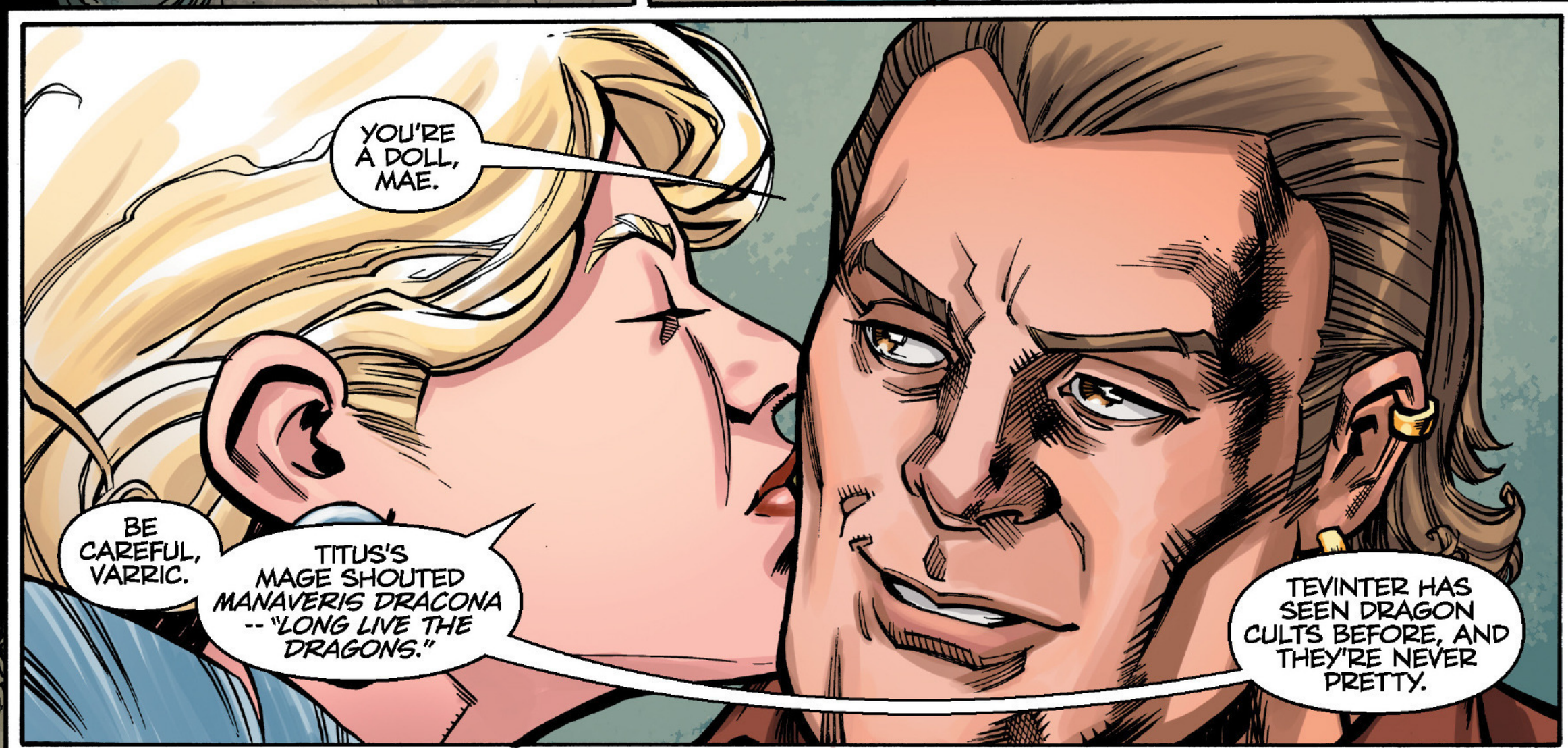
YOU!

OUT OF THE WAY!
PLEASE--
AH!

ISABELA.
THANK YOU...I THOUGHT HE WAS GOING TO --

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
DEVON!

TITUS'S MAN GOT HIM.
BUT WE HAVE OUR CAPTIVE, AT LEAST -- ASSUMING HE KNOWS ANYTHING.
DAMN IT.
YOU SHOULD LEAVE BEFORE THE GUARD ARRIVES.
THERE WILL BE QUESTIONS, AND IT'D BE BETTER IF A MAGISTER IS THE ONE ANSWERING THEM.


YOU'RE A DOLL, MAE.
BE CAREFUL, VARRIC.
TITUS'S MAGE SHOUTED *MANAVERIS DRACONA* -- "*LONG LIVE THE DRAGONS.*"
TEVINTER HAS SEEN DRAGON CULTS BEFORE, AND THEY'RE NEVER PRETTY.

THANK YOU AGAIN -- IF YOU EVER NEED *ANYTHING*, GET WORD TO ME THROUGH VARRIC.
ARE YOU OKAY?
FINE.
YOU'RE SURE?
YOU'RE COVERED IN BLOOD.

THERE ARE WORSE THINGS THAN BLOOD.
LET'S GET TO THE SHIP.
TITUS'S CULTIST BIT MY WRIST WHILE I WAS TYING HIM UP.

HE WOULDN'T SAY MUCH ABOUT HIS MASTER. VARRIC TRICKED A LOCATION OUT OF HIM, BUT NOW HE'S SULKING IN THE HOLD AND REFUSING TO TALK.

AND TODAY WE'RE ON OUR WAY TO TITUS'S HOME ON THE ISLAND OF SEHERON.

...CHECK THE BILGE AND START STRAPPING DOWN CARGO -- I DON'T WANT PROBLEMS IF THAT STORM HITS.

STILL NOTHING, CAPTAIN.

AND?

AND THE CREW IS TERRIFIED.

AFTER EVERYTHING YOU TOLD THEM --

SEHERON IS *DISPUTED* TERRITORY BETWEEN TEVINTER AND THE QUNARI.

I'M NOT BREAKING ANY PROMISES.

DIDN'T SAY YOU WERE.

BUT SOME OF OUR BOYS WERE IN KIRKWALL WHEN THE QUNARI HIT THE CITY...

...AND THE REST *LISTEN* WHEN YOU CALL THE QUNARI *"BASTARD HORN-HEADED FANATICS"*--

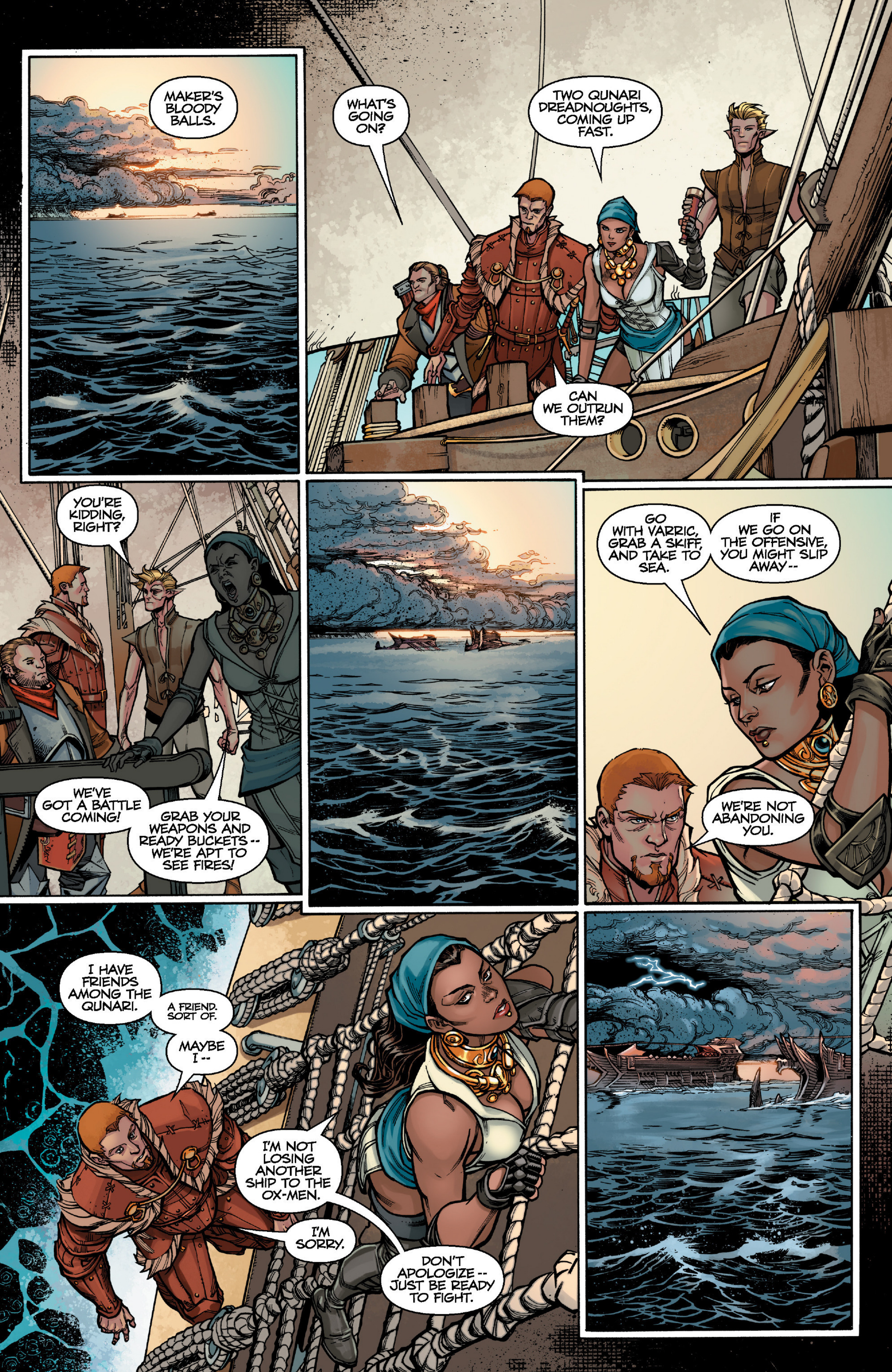
-- *"WHO'D RAVAGE THEIR OWN MOTHERS FOR THE CHANCE TO KILL OR, BETTER YET, CONVERT YOU."*

I *WANT* THE CREW SCARED.

KEEP THEM FOCUSED, AND KEEP THEM SOBER.

YES, CAPTAIN.

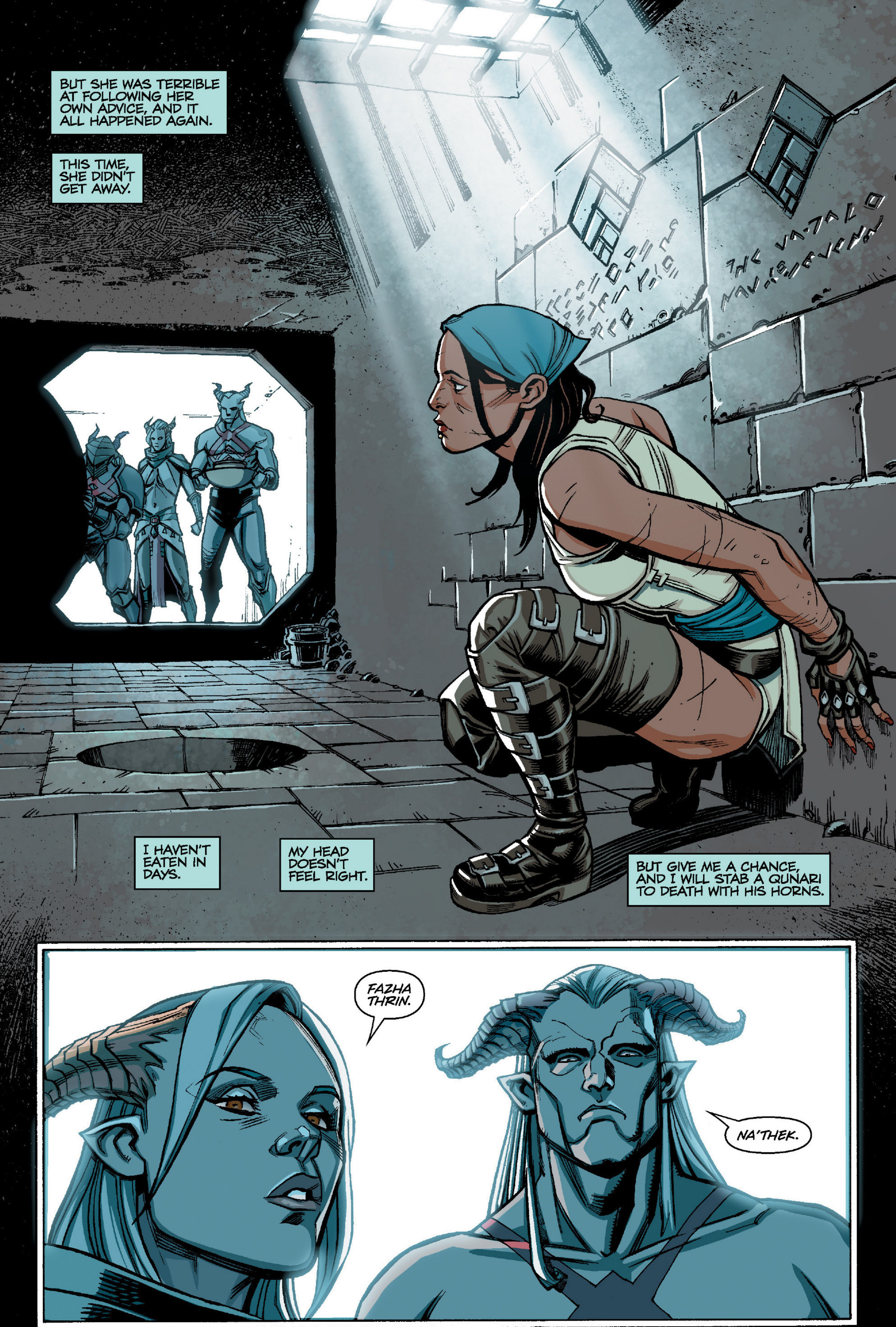
...SHE SETS ONE FOOT ON DECK, AND YOU FORGET WHAT SHE'S LIKE WITH A BOTTLE OF RUM AND A CROWDED TAVERN.
I DON'T FORGET -- I'VE STILL GOT THE SCARS FROM OSTWICK.
WHAT?
NEVER MIND.
DO YOU HAVE A PLAN FOR TITUS, YET?
I HAVEN'T THOUGHT THAT FAR AHEAD.
UH-HUH.
YOU DON'T SEEM TOO BOTHERED BY WHAT HAPPENED IN TEVINTER, EITHER.
I FOUND THE MAN WHO STOLE MY FATHER AWAY.
THE MAN WHO -- INTENTIONALLY OR NOT -- STARTED FERELDEN ON THE PATH TO CIVIL WAR.
SOMETIMES YOU NEED TO FLUSH A RABBIT OUT OF ITS HOLE SO YOU CAN CHASE IT DOWN.
AND IF IT RUNS BACK INTO ITS HOLE TO GATHER A HUNDRED OTHER RABBITS THAT COME AFTER YOU?
THEN WE'LL BE LIVING HIGH ON RABBIT STEW FOR MONTHS TO COME.
ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY USE BLOOD MAGIC.
I HATE RABBITS.
I HEAR YOU.
CAPTAIN!


MAKER'S BLOODY BALLS.
WHAT'S GOING ON?
TWO QUNARI DREADNOUGHTS, COMING UP FAST.
CAN WE OUTRUN THEM?
YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT?
WE'VE GOT A BATTLE COMING!
GRAB YOUR WEAPONS AND READY BUCKETS -- WE'RE APT TO SEE FIRES!
GO WITH VARRIC, GRAB A SKIFF, AND TAKE TO SEA.
IF WE GO ON THE OFFENSIVE, YOU MIGHT SLIP AWAY--
WE'RE NOT ABANDONING YOU.
I HAVE FRIENDS AMONG THE QUNARI.
A FRIEND. SORT OF.
MAYBE I --
I'M NOT LOSING ANOTHER SHIP TO THE OX-MEN.
I'M SORRY.
DON'T APOLOGIZE -- JUST BE READY TO FIGHT.

THROOM
GAATLOK CANNON!
INCOMING!
KRRAKK
THAT WAS A WARNING SHOT.
BASTARDS MEAN TO BOARD US.
THAT WAS A WARNING SHOT?
THEY'RE MONSTERS.
WHEN WE GET BACK TO SHORE--
--A DRINK FOR EVERY STINKING QUNARI HORN WE BRING HOME!

YOUR COMMAND, TAMASSRAN?
TAKE THEM PRISONER.
ALL OF THEM.

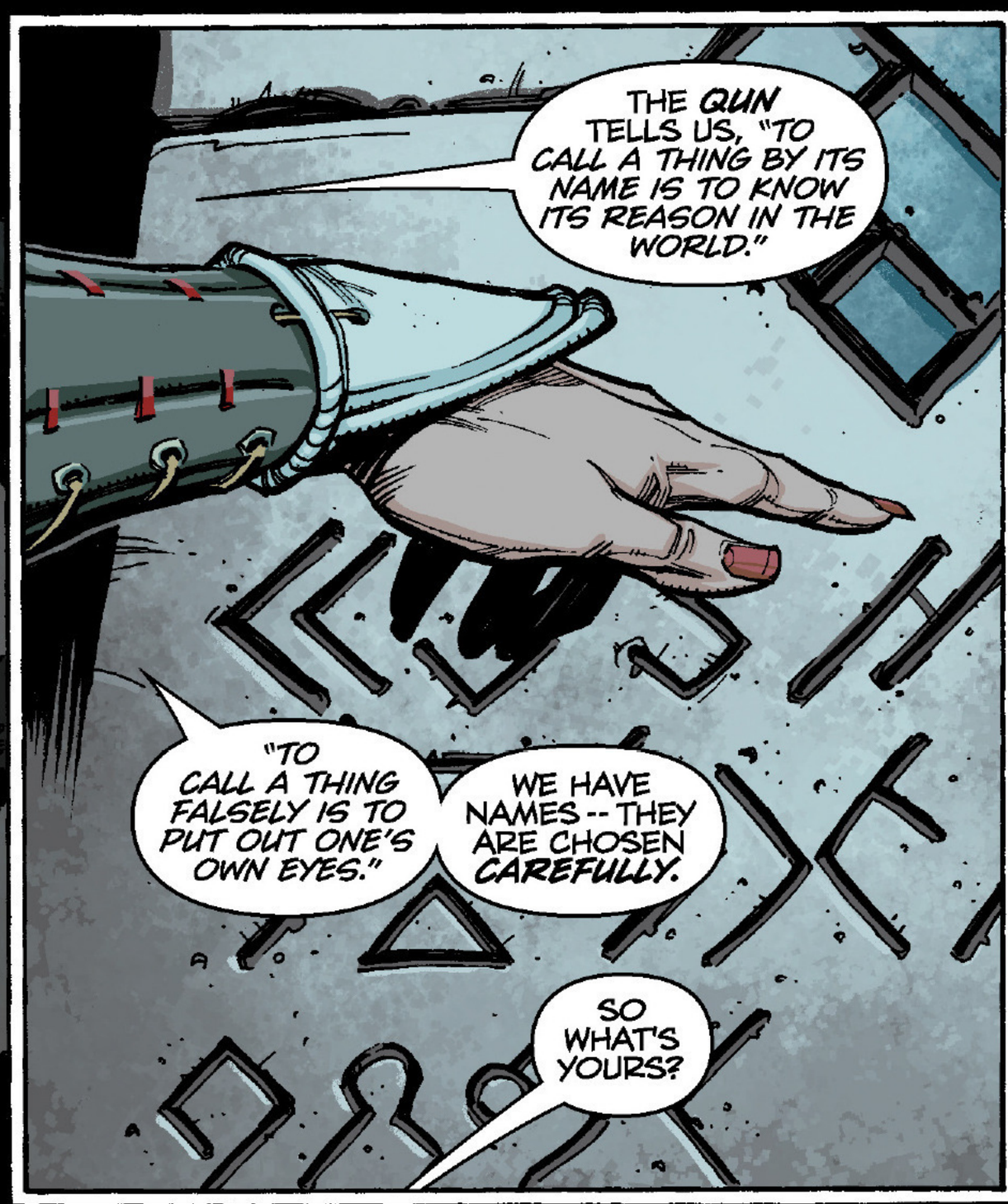
CHAPTER 2
MANY YEARS AGO, A WOMAN CALLED ISABELA DID A VERY STUPID THING THAT MADE THE QUNARI WANT TO *KILL HER.*
THEY DESTROYED HER SHIP AND MURDERED MOST OF HER BEAUTIFUL, *FILTHY* CREW, BUT SHE WAS LUCKY AND GOT AWAY.
SHE GOT ANOTHER SHIP.
SHE TOLD HER NEW CREW TO *STAY AWAY* FROM QUNARI.

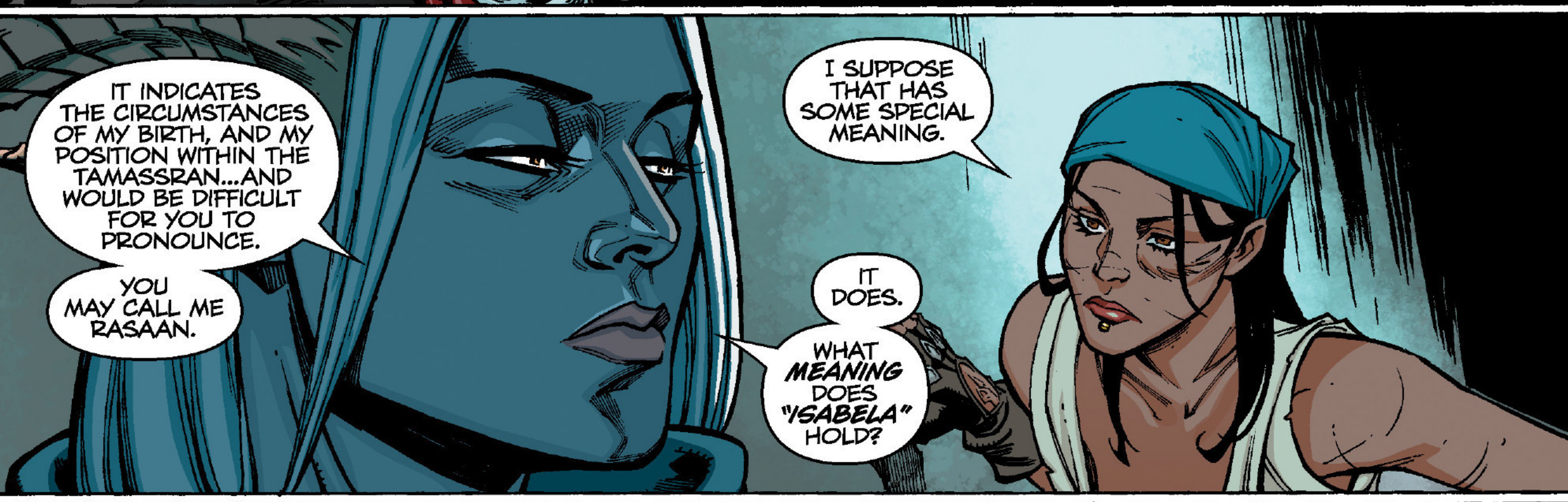

BUT SHE WAS TERRIBLE AT FOLLOWING HER OWN ADVICE, AND IT ALL HAPPENED AGAIN.
THIS TIME, SHE DIDN'T GET AWAY.
I HAVEN'T EATEN IN DAYS.
MY HEAD DOESN'T FEEL RIGHT.
BUT GIVE ME A CHANCE, AND I WILL STAB A QUNARI TO DEATH WITH HIS HORNS.
FAZHA THRIN.
NA'THEK.

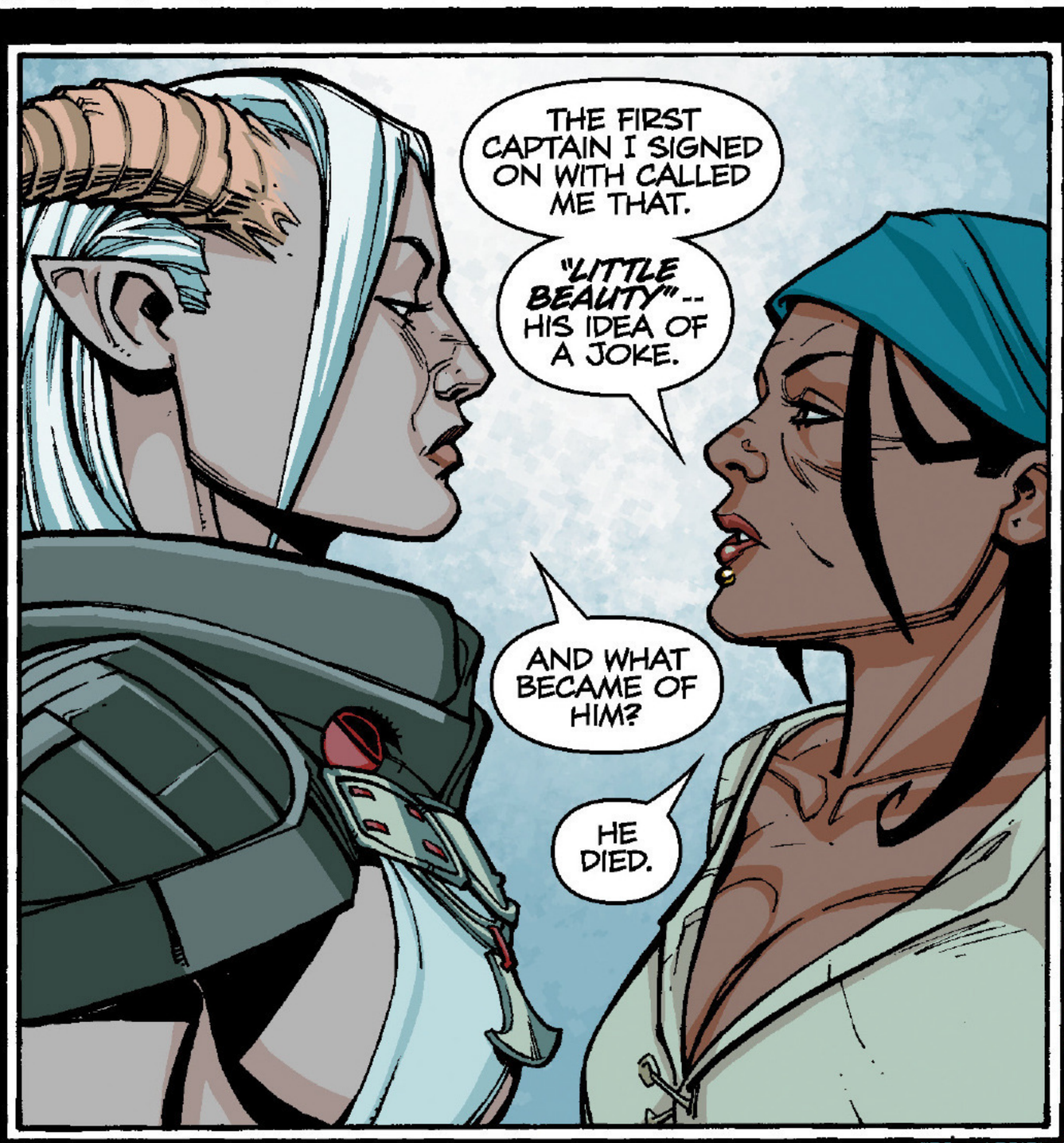
WHERE'S MY CREW?
WHERE'S ALISTAIR AND VARRIC?
DO YOU KNOW WHAT THIS IS?
YOU SPEAK THE KING'S TONGUE?
THAT IS MY FUNCTION.
I AM TAMASSRAN --"THOSE WHO SPEAK."
YOU'RE A PRIESTESS.
WE ARE HERE TO CONVERSE, AND THAT IS ALL YOU NEED CONCERN YOURSELF WITH.
I REPEAT-- DO YOU KNOW WHAT THIS IS?
NO.
YOU LIE, BUT IT MATTERS NOT.
THIS IS QAMEK -- SHOULD WE FAIL TO REACH AN UNDERSTANDING, IT SHALL BE USED TO RENDER YOU VIDATH-BAS.
SO YOU'LL TURN ME INTO A DROOLING IDIOT IF I DON'T SEE THINGS YOUR WAY?
THE QAMEK FREES MEN AND WOMEN OTHERWISE BEYOND REDEMPTION.
ENLIGHTENMENT REQUIRES SUBMISSION TO WISDOM.
YOU WILL SUBMIT.

LET US BEGIN WITH YOUR NAME.
MY NAME IS ISABELA.
AS YOU'RE WELL AWARE.
YOUR REAL NAME.
PTT
IF YOU'RE GOING TO SHOVE THAT THING DOWN MY THROAT, YOU'D BEST GET TO IT.
AND WE WOULD HAVE EVERY REASON TO, AFTER THE CRIMES YOU COMMITTED AGAINST MY PEOPLE.
YOU STOLE FROM US, KILLED MANY--IF WE WERE HUMAN, WE WOULD PARADE YOUR HEAD ON A SPEAR.
BUT WE ARE NOT HUMAN, AND WE WASTE NOTHING...NOT EVEN THOSE OF LITTLE WORTH.

ONCE AGAIN -- YOUR NAME.
WHY DO YOU CARE?
QUNARI DON'T EVEN HAVE NAMES.


THE QUN TELLS US, "TO CALL A THING BY ITS NAME IS TO KNOW ITS REASON IN THE WORLD."
"TO CALL A THING FALSELY IS TO PUT OUT ONE'S OWN EYES."
WE HAVE NAMES -- THEY ARE CHOSEN CAREFULLY.
SO WHAT'S YOURS?


IT INDICATES THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF MY BIRTH, AND MY POSITION WITHIN THE TAMASSRAN...AND WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO PRONOUNCE.
YOU MAY CALL ME RASAAN.
I SUPPOSE THAT HAS SOME SPECIAL MEANING.
IT DOES.
WHAT MEANING DOES "ISABELA" HOLD?


THE FIRST CAPTAIN I SIGNED ON WITH CALLED ME THAT.
"LITTLE BEAUTY"-- HIS IDEA OF A JOKE.
AND WHAT BECAME OF HIM?
HE DIED.

HOW DID HE DIE?
BADLY.

DO MANY PEOPLE DIE THIS WAY AROUND YOU?
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
I'M A PIRATE.
AND THAT IS A GOOD THING?
RAGE.
YOUTH.
I'VE MADE A LOT OF STUPID MISTAKES.
I DON'T FEEL GUILTY ABOUT ANY OF THEM.
WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?
I WANT YOUR NAME.
VICTORY.
SURVIVE.
STOP BLOODY ASKING ME!

IT MEANS FREEDOM.

SOMETHING YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND WHEN YOU FORCE EVERY THRICE-DAMNED BASTARD YOU MEET INTO YOUR PERFECT LITTLE CULT!

HOPE.

TERROR.

WET.

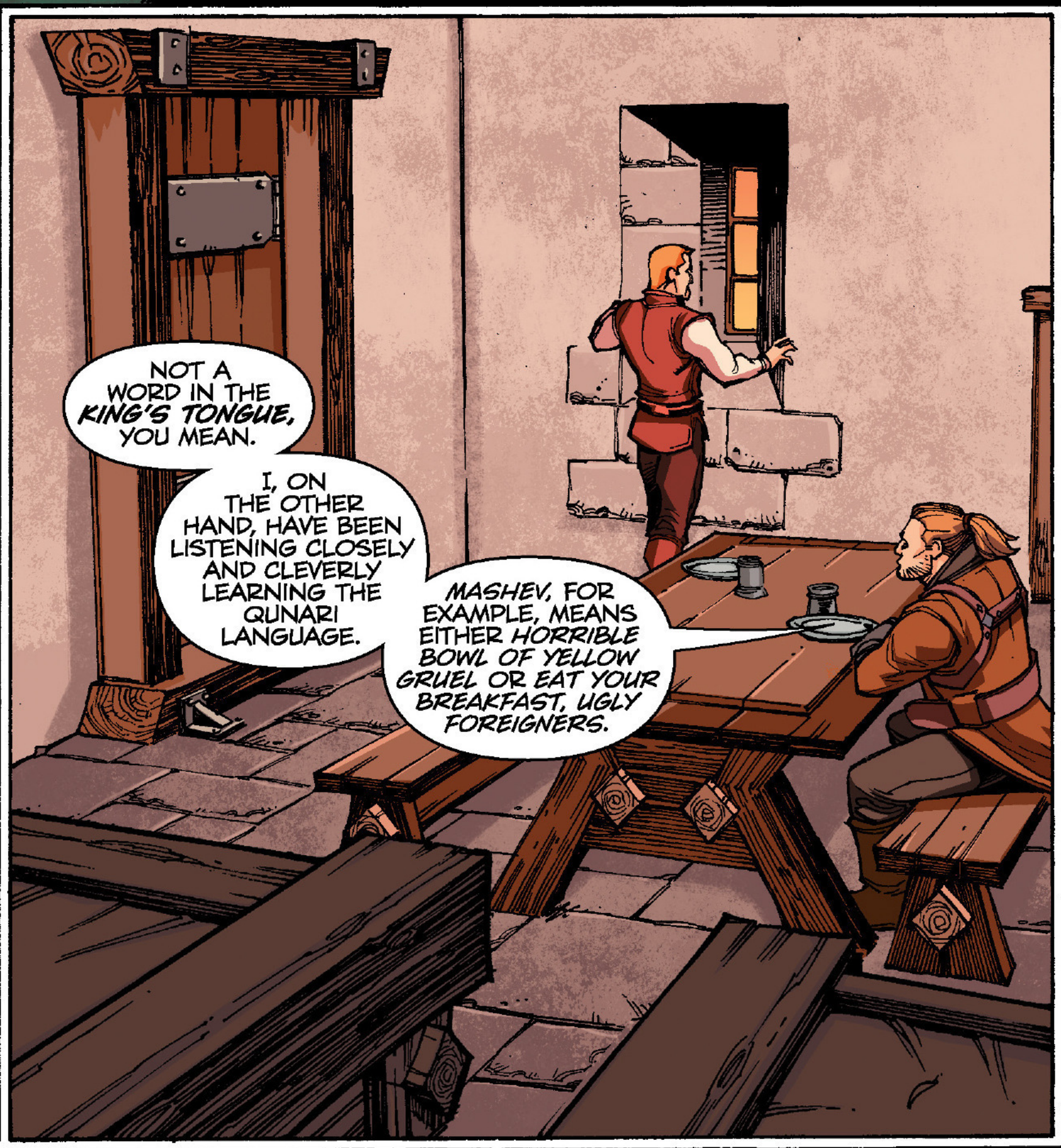
RELIEF.

FREEDOM FROM WHAT?

YOUR LIFE OFFERS YOU FREEDOM FROM... RESPONSIBILITY?

FROM GUILT?

THREE WEEKS, AND NOT A WORD!


NOT A WORD IN THE *KING'S TONGUE*, YOU MEAN.
I, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAVE BEEN LISTENING CLOSELY AND CLEVERLY LEARNING THE QUNARI LANGUAGE.
MASHEV, FOR EXAMPLE, MEANS EITHER *HORRIBLE BOWL OF YELLOW GRUEL* OR *EAT YOUR BREAKFAST, UGLY FOREIGNERS.*

I'M GLAD YOU'RE ENJOYING YOURSELF.
YOU HAVEN'T DEALT MUCH WITH QUNARI, HAVE YOU?
JUST ONE, REALLY.
BE GLAD NO ONE'S COME -- WHEN THEY DO, IT'LL BE TO CONVERT US.

YOU THINK THAT'S WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ISABELA?
PROBABLY.
BACK IN THE DAY, ISABELA STOLE A QUNARI SACRED TEXT -- THE TOME OF KOSLUN.
THEY GOT IT BACK EVENTUALLY, BUT THE THEFT LED TO THE INVASION OF KIRKWALL, WHICH LED TO MORE BLOODSHED, AND, WELL --
THEIR WARLORD -- THE ARISHOK -- DIED. THE QUNARI DON'T FORGIVE.

IT IS TIME.
THE ARISHOK HAS ASKED FOR YOU.
THE DEAD ONE?
ONE DIES, AND ANOTHER ARISES.
OLD STONE, COASTAL LOCATION, NOT MANY CONVERTS.
WE'RE IN A SEHERON WAR CAMP, RECENTLY REOCCUPIED.
NOWHERE CONVENIENT TO RUN ONCE WE ESCAPE, THEN.
YOU MEMORIZE THE EXITS. I'LL REMEMBER THE PATROLS.
I TOLD YOU THEY SHOULD'VE BLINDFOLDED US.
ARISHOK -- THEY HAVE COME.

IT HAS BEEN MANY YEARS, KADAN.

STEN?

YOU KNOW HIM?

WE FOUGHT TOGETHER AGAINST THE BLIGHT.

STEN, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

WHY ARE YOU--

STEN IS NO LONGER MY TITLE.

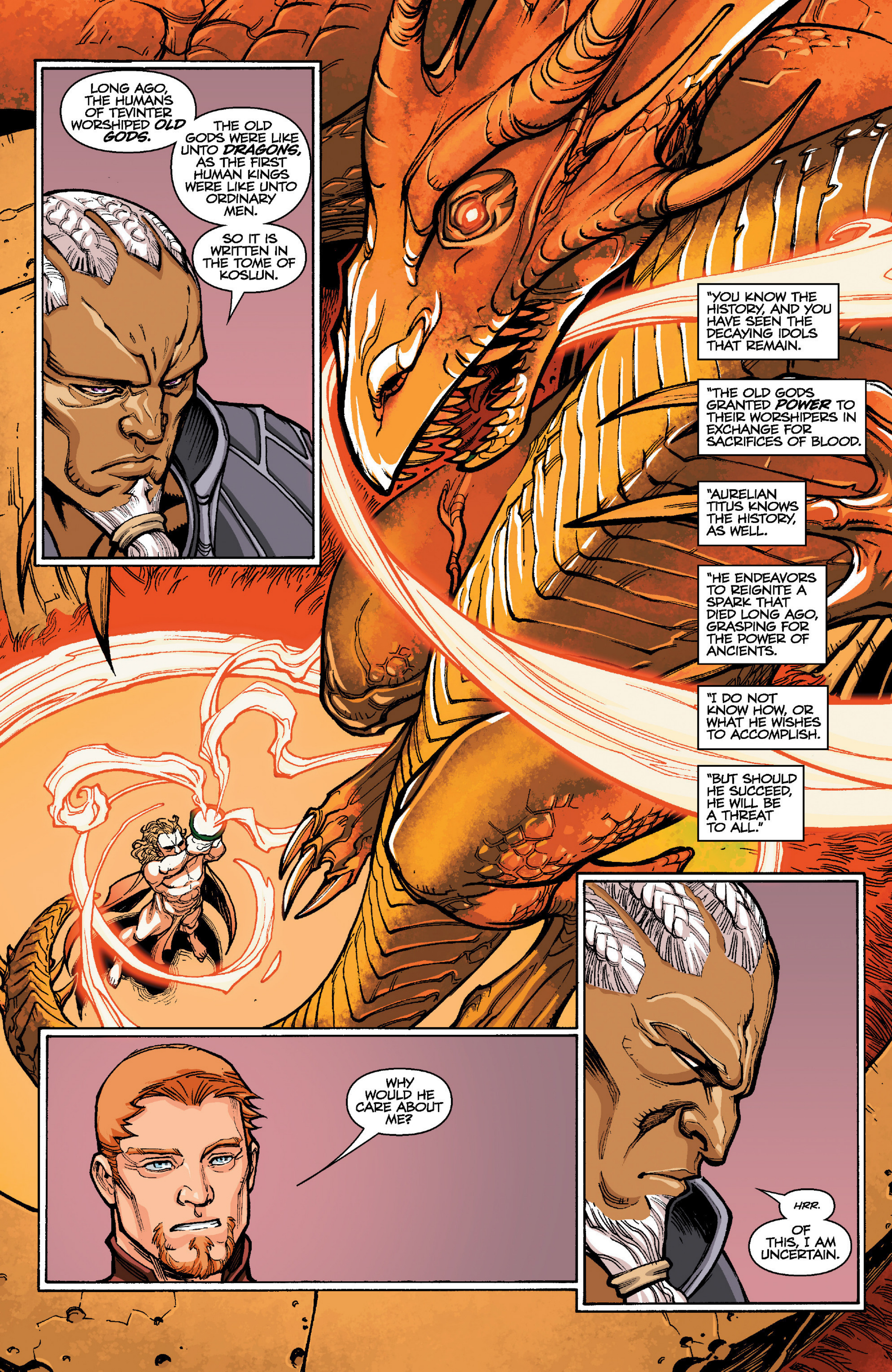
I AM *ARISHOK*, AND YOU HAVE BEEN A *FOOL*.

THE ONE YOU KNOW AS AURELIAN TITUS WISHES YOU IN HIS GRASP, YET YOU WOULD CHASE HIM INTO HIS LAIR?

FUNNY, I SAID THE SAME THING.

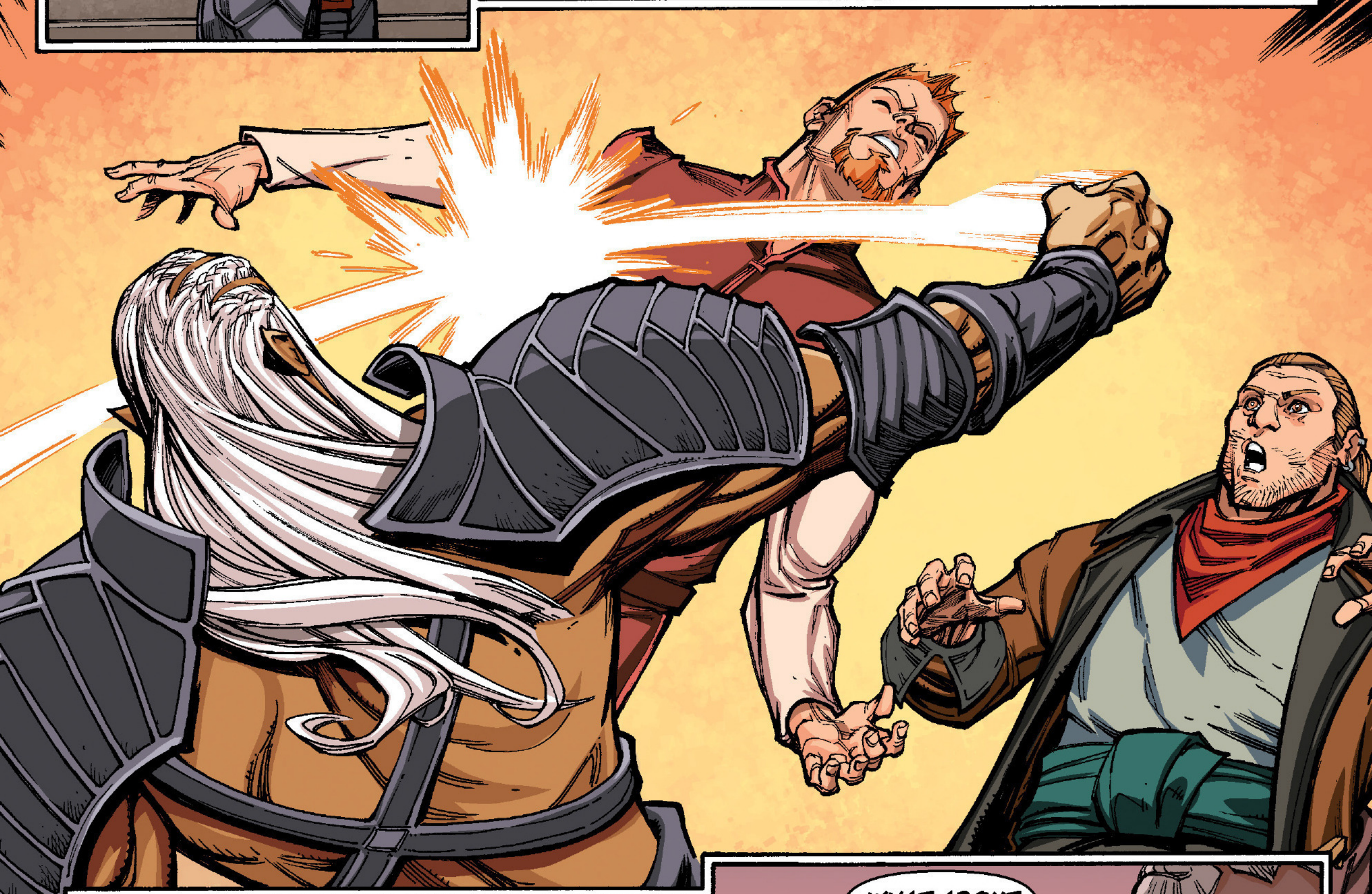
IT CANNOT BE ALLOWED.

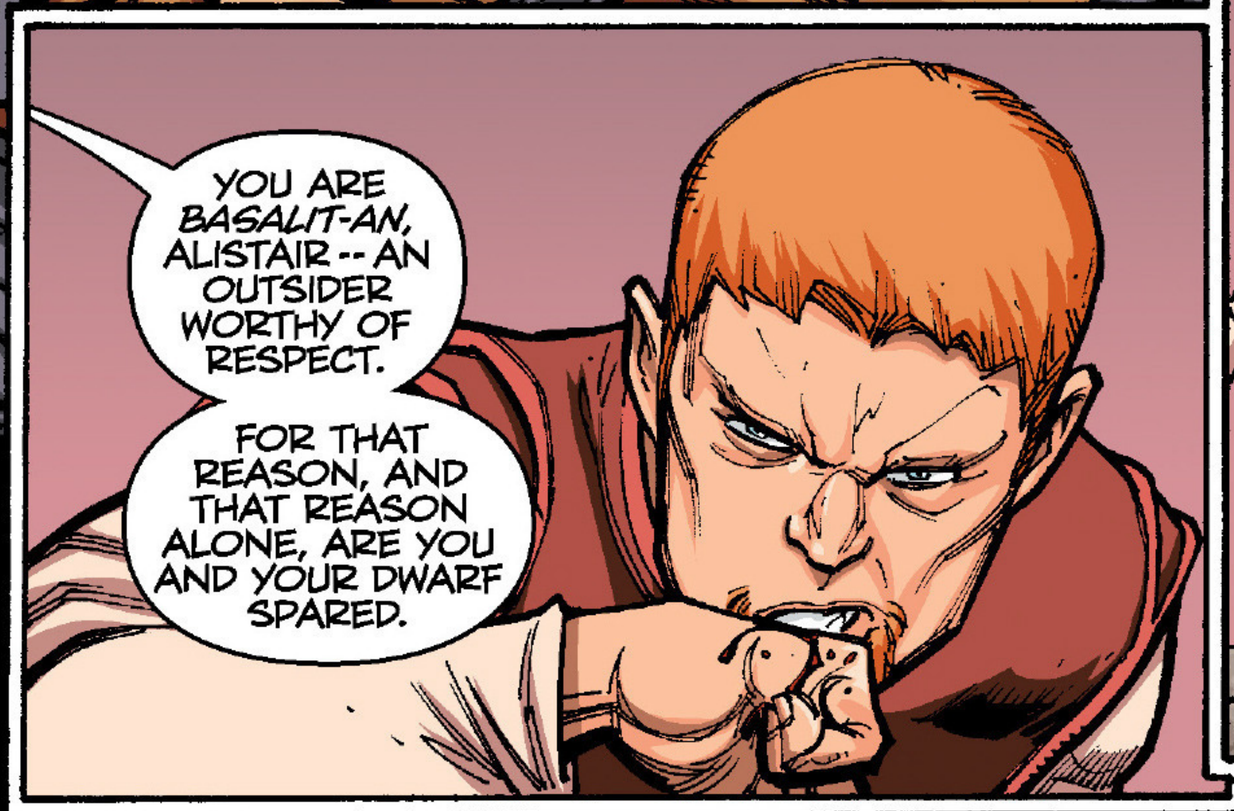
WHAT DOES TITUS MATTER TO YOU?

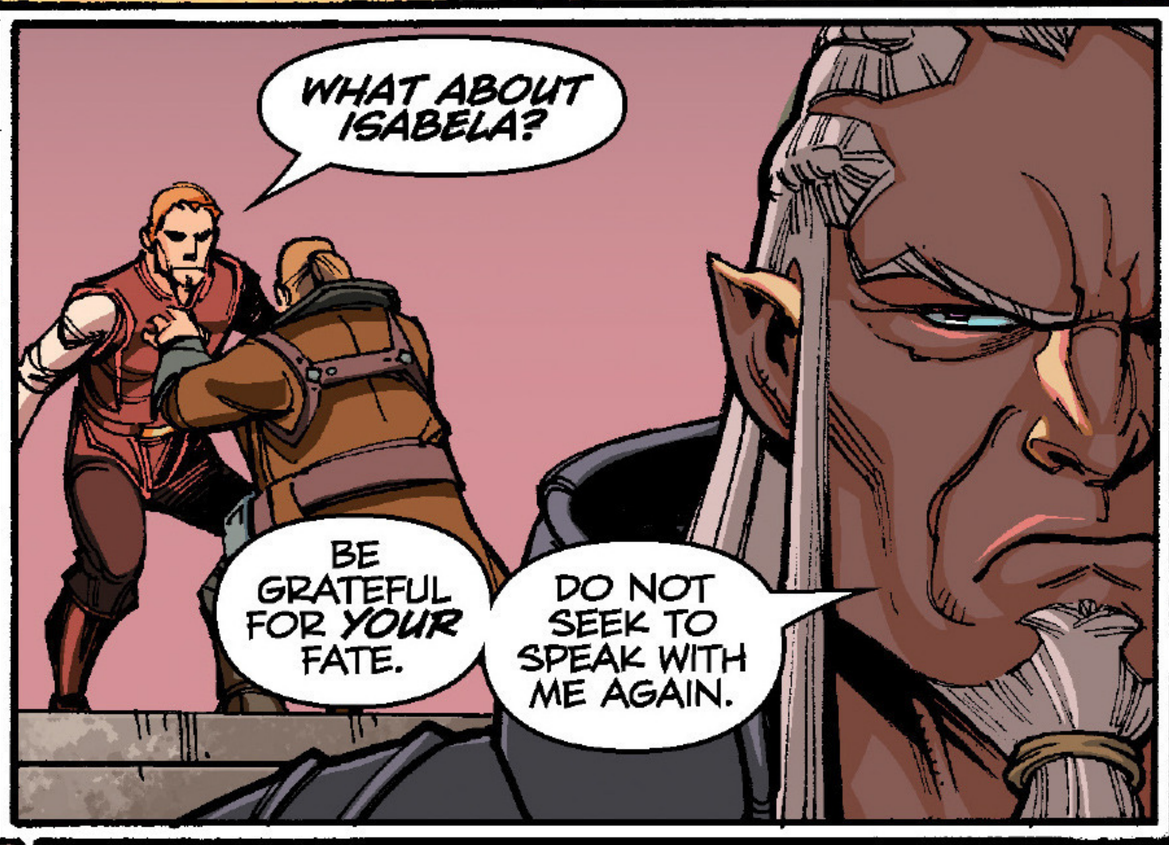

LONG AGO, THE HUMANS OF TEVINTER WORSHIPED OLD GODS.
THE OLD GODS WERE LIKE UNTO DRAGONS, AS THE FIRST HUMAN KINGS WERE LIKE UNTO ORDINARY MEN.
SO IT IS WRITTEN IN THE TOME OF KOSLUN.
"YOU KNOW THE HISTORY, AND YOU HAVE SEEN THE DECAYING IDOLS THAT REMAIN.
"THE OLD GODS GRANTED POWER TO THEIR WORSHIPERS IN EXCHANGE FOR SACRIFICES OF BLOOD.
"AURELIAN TITUS KNOWS THE HISTORY, AS WELL.
"HE ENDEAVORS TO REIGNITE A SPARK THAT DIED LONG AGO, GRASPING FOR THE POWER OF ANCIENTS.
"I DO NOT KNOW HOW, OR WHAT HE WISHES TO ACCOMPLISH.
"BUT SHOULD HE SUCCEED, HE WILL BE A THREAT TO ALL."
WHY WOULD HE CARE ABOUT ME?
HRR.
OF THIS, I AM UNCERTAIN.

BUT UNTIL THIS HUMAN IS STOPPED, YOU WILL REMAIN A *GUEST* HERE IN AKHAAZ.

WHY WOULD HE CARE ABOUT MY *FATHER?*
WHAT DO *DRAGONS* HAVE TO DO WITH MY *BLOODLINE,* OR THE POWER OF THE WORLD?
YOU KNOW *MORE* THAN YOU'RE SAYING!

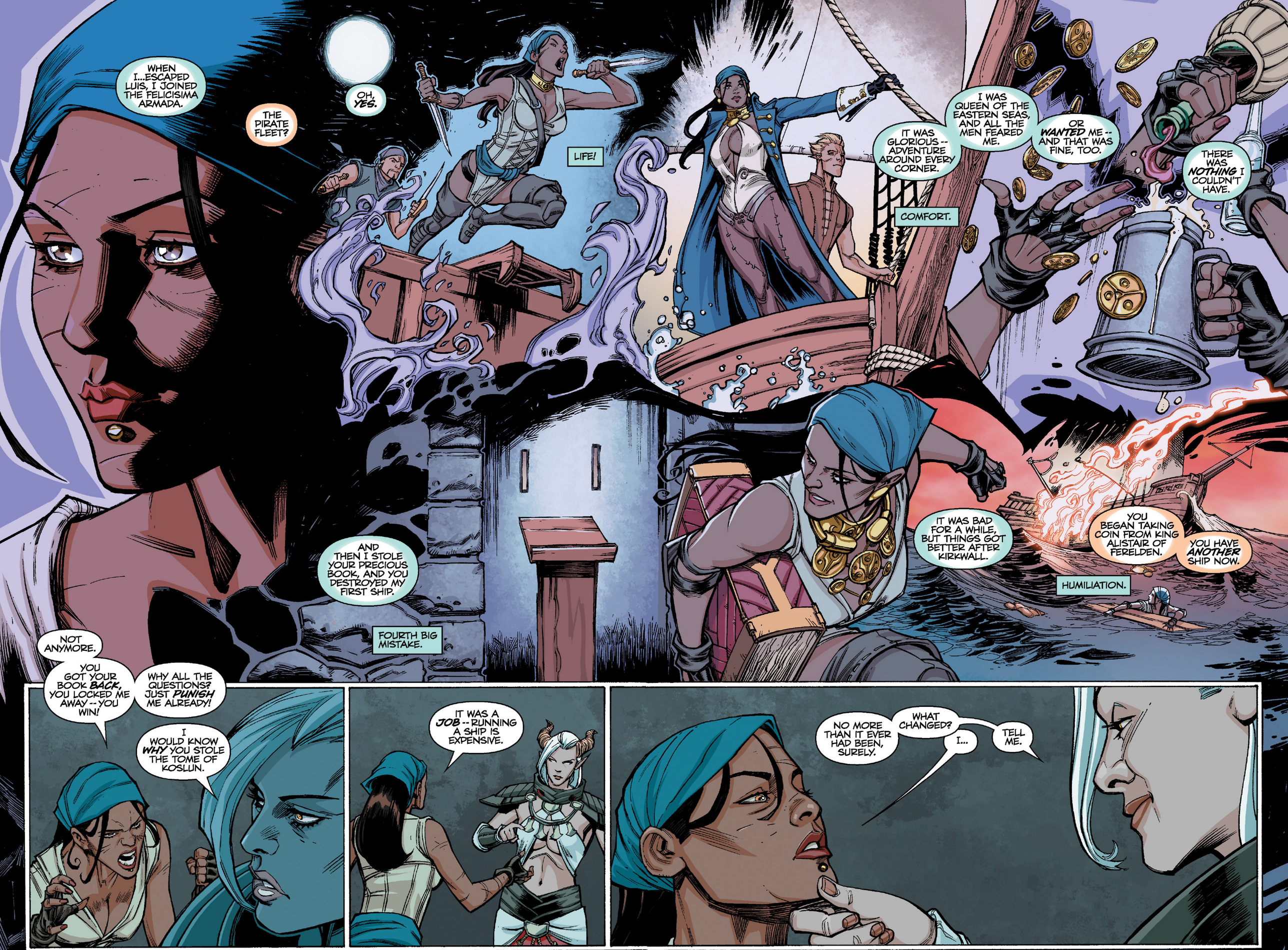



YOU ARE *BASALIT-AN,* ALISTAIR -- AN OUTSIDER WORTHY OF RESPECT.
FOR THAT REASON, AND THAT REASON ALONE, ARE YOU AND YOUR DWARF SPARED.


WHAT ABOUT ISABELA?
BE GRATEFUL FOR *YOUR* FATE.
DO NOT SEEK TO SPEAK WITH ME AGAIN.

YOUR NAME.
THAT'S ALL YOU KEEP ASKING.
WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?
WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT YOU NOT TELL ME?
WHAT HAPPENED TO MY MOTHER?
TELL ME OF HER, AND PERHAPS I CAN ANSWER.

I GREW UP IN RIVAIN.
QUNARI EMISSARIES WERE ALWAYS AROUND -- EASIER THAN FIGHTING THEM OFF, AND THEY STAYED AWAY FROM THE NOBILITY.
I DON'T REMEMBER WHEN I FIRST HEARD ABOUT THE QUN, BUT IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE MY MOTHER BELIEVED.
SHE'D SNEAK OFF TO THE TEMPLE BEFORE DAWN -- SHE SWALLOWED EVERY LIE YOU PEOPLE FED HER.
LITTLE GIRL'S JEALOUSY.
LIKE SHE THOUGHT SLAVERY ISN'T SLAVERY IF YOU CALL IT A CODE.
SHE WANTED TO JOIN THE QUNARI, AND I DIDN'T --
HEARTBREAK.
-- SO SHE SOLD ME TO AN ANTIVAN MERCHANT.
THAT'S THE LAST I SAW OF HER.
YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HER.
YOU WRITE IT ALL DOWN. YOU WOULDN'T HAVE COME HERE WITHOUT --
YOUR MOTHER IS VERY LIKELY AMONG THE VIDDATHAARI OF PAR VOLLEN, SERVING THE QUN, WORKING THE FIELDS, AND TREASURED BY ALL.
BUT I COULD NOT BE CERTAIN WITHOUT CONSULTING OUR RECORDS, AND THEY ARE FAR AWAY.
DO YOU REGRET YOUR PARTING?
I... DIDN'T LIKE LEAVING IT THAT WAY.
WOULD YOUR LIFE HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT HAD YOU REMAINED WITH HER?
WOULD IT HAVE BEEN BETTER?
I DON'T REGRET MY LIFE.
DO YOU NOT?


WHEN I...ESCAPED LUIS, I JOINED THE FELICISIMA ARMADA.
THE PIRATE FLEET?
OH, YES.
LIFE!
IT WAS GLORIOUS -- ADVENTURE AROUND EVERY CORNER.
I WAS QUEEN OF THE EASTERN SEAS, AND ALL THE MEN FEARED ME.
OR WANTED ME -- AND THAT WAS FINE, TOO.
THERE WAS NOTHING I COULDN'T HAVE.
COMFORT.
AND THEN I STOLE YOUR PRECIOUS BOOK, AND YOU DESTROYED MY FIRST SHIP.
FOURTH BIG MISTAKE.
IT WAS BAD FOR A WHILE, BUT THINGS GOT BETTER AFTER KIRKWALL.
YOU BEGAN TAKING COIN FROM KING ALISTAIR OF FERELDEN.
YOU HAVE ANOTHER SHIP NOW.
HUMILIATION.
NOT ANYMORE.
YOU GOT YOUR BOOK BACK, YOU LOCKED ME AWAY -- YOU WIN!
WHY ALL THE QUESTIONS? JUST PUNISH ME ALREADY!
I WOULD KNOW WHY YOU STOLE THE TOME OF KOSLUN.
IT WAS A JOB -- RUNNING A SHIP IS EXPENSIVE.
NO MORE THAN IT EVER HAD BEEN, SURELY.
WHAT CHANGED?
I...
TELL ME.

THE FELICISIMA ARMADA DOESN'T HAVE A LOT OF RULES.
BUT YOU PAY YOUR DUES, NO MATTER WHAT -- AND SOME KINDS OF CARGO PAY BETTER THAN OTHERS.
WE WEREN'T A SLAVE SHIP.
WE WERE JUST...CARRYING SLAVES.
THEY LOOKED AT ME LIKE I WAS THE ONE WHO'D BOUGHT THEM.
BITTERNESS.
THEY CAME WITH DEVON, THE ARMADA'S "PROCURER" IN THE NORTH.
HE ENJOYED HIS BUSINESS.
DISGUST.
I NEEDED A DISTRACTION FROM THE JOB -- IT WORKED, FOR A WHILE.
UNTIL THE ORLESIAN NAVY FOUND US.
NOTHING.
STUPID.
ORLESIANS HANG SLAVERS.
WE NEEDED TO ESCAPE, BUT DEVON HAD PACKED THE HOLDS SO TIGHT --
WE WERE TOO SLOW.
I TRIED, I TRIED SO MANY THINGS, BUT SHIPS ARE SHIPS AND THE SEA IS THE SEA, AND THE ORLESIANS WERE GAINING.
I WASN'T GOING TO DIE -- NOT LIKE THAT.
WE HAD TO DUMP THE CARGO.

THE SLAVES COULD HAVE OVERWHELMED US, BUT THEY DIDN'T KNOW WHAT WAS HAPPENING.

PLEASE.

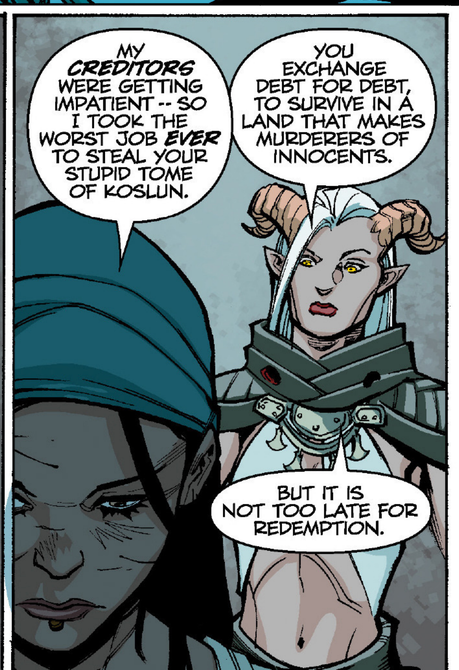
IT WASN'T ALL TOGETHER -- THEY CAME ONE, TWO AT A TIME...

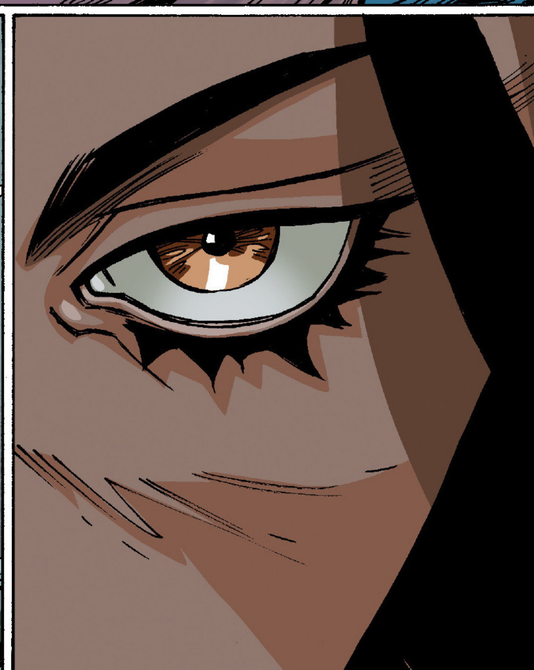
MAKE IT STOP.

STOP.

I...TOLD MYSELF THEY WERE BETTER OFF BENEATH THE SEA THAN WEARING COLLARS.

ESCAPE.





YOU WANT ME TO BE SORRY FOR WHAT I'VE DONE?
THE QUNARI ARE BUTCHERS.
I WON'T BE SORRY FOR YOU!
HRR.
THEN LET ALL YOUR NAMES BE ERASED.
THE QUN WELCOMES YOU.

CHAPTER 3

MY HEAD IS A LEAD CAULDRON BOILING WITH OIL.

THE QUNARI BITCH-PRIESTESS'S SWEAT SMELLS LIKE SOUR GOAT MILK.

YOU WERE GIVEN EVERY CHANCE.

YOU COULD HAVE HAD REDEMPTION, HONOR...A PLACE OF *MEANING* IN THIS WORLD.

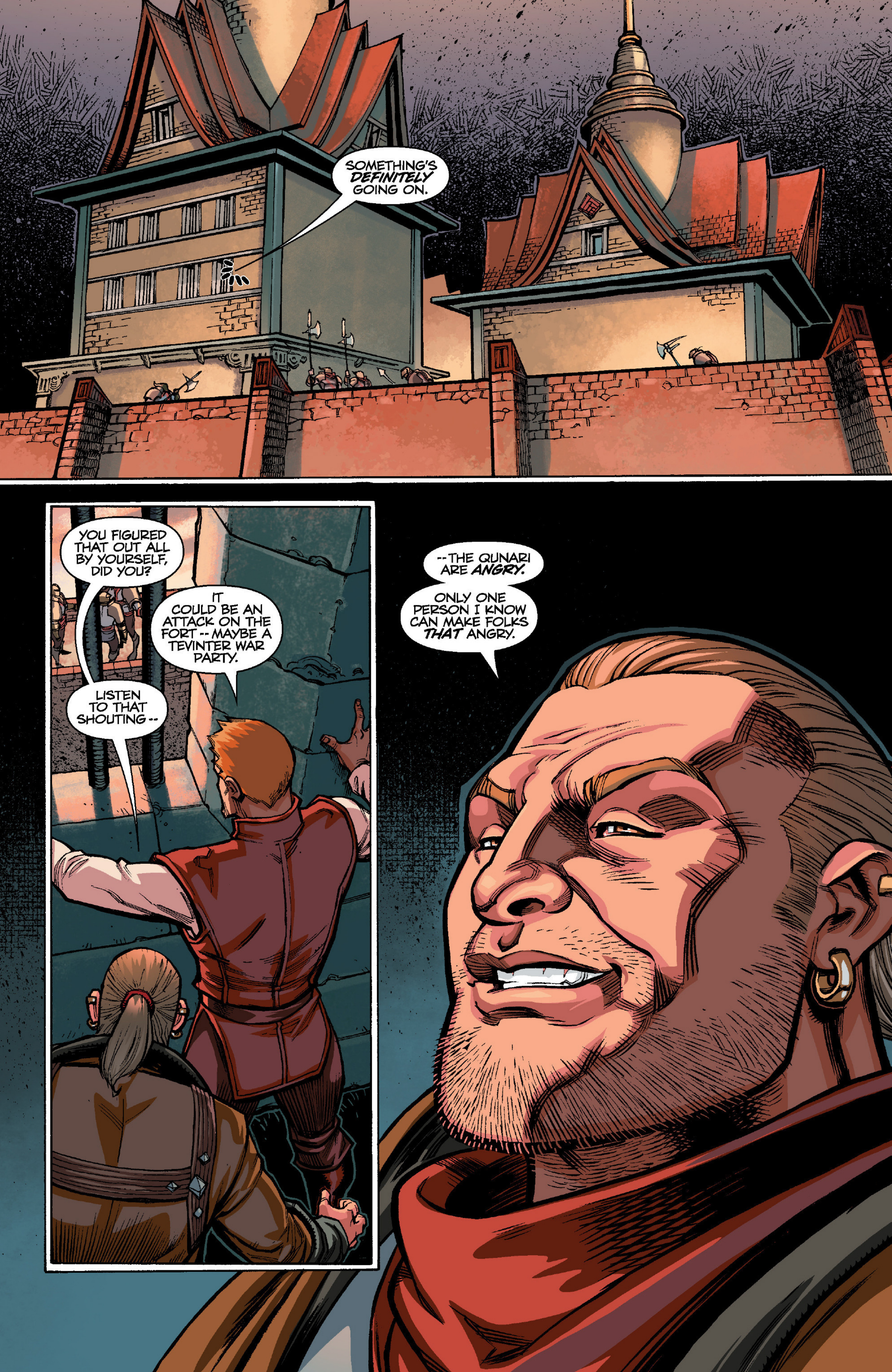
SHUT *UP!*

THINKING KILLS.

THIS IS INSTINCT.

TAMASS'RA!

RUN.
RUN.
RUN!
FIND HER.
TELL THE ARISHOK.


SOMETHING'S DEFINITELY GOING ON.
YOU FIGURED THAT OUT ALL BY YOURSELF, DID YOU?
IT COULD BE AN ATTACK ON THE FORT -- MAYBE A TEVINTER WAR PARTY.
LISTEN TO THAT SHOUTING --
--THE QUNARI ARE ANGRY.
ONLY ONE PERSON I KNOW CAN MAKE FOLKS THAT ANGRY.

MAKER'S BURSTING BLACKHEADS!
DON'T YOU HAVE AN AWFULLY NICE PRISON CELL?
BEAT UP A PRIESTESS.
HOW DID YOU --
-- FIND US, I WAS GOING TO SAY.
YOURS WAS THE BUILDING WHERE THEY SENT REINFORCEMENTS.
IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU.
YOU, TOO.
YOU THINKING US THREE SHOULD MAKE A RUN FOR IT?
I DON'T KNOW, RIVAINI...
BETTER THAN WAITING ON THE QUNARI.
UNLESS YOU'D RATHER A FATE BASED ON WHAT THE HOLY QUN SAYS ABOUT THE COLOR OF YOUR PISS?
POINT TAKEN.
MAKE SURE ALISTAIR GETS OUT.
YOU UNDERSTAND?
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
TO FIND MY CREW.
THEY CAN STAY OR DIE FIGHTING, BUT THEY DESERVE THE CHOICE.

KLIK
I LOVE THAT SOUND.
PLACE IS A MAZE -- YOU THINK YOU'RE OUTSIDE AND THEN YOU'RE SURROUNDED BY WALLS.
EASY TO GET CORNERED IN THE BUILDINGS, BUT AT LEAST INDOORS YOU CAN HIDE.
CHIMNEYS? VENTILATION?
FINE FOR ME, BUT ALISTAIR WILL NEVER FIT.
SHE JUST CALLED ME FAT, DIDN'T SHE?
READY?
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
YOU LOOK...
JUST GET OUT SAFE.
AND IF WE DON'T SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN...GOOD LUCK.

GO!

GO!

THIS IS HOW I ABANDON MY FRIENDS...

...FOR THE SAKE OF FLEA-RIDDEN BOTTOM FEEDERS WHO CAN BARELY HOIST A SAIL WITHOUT VOMITING UP LAST NIGHT'S WINE.

KEY?

KEY.

BUT TO WHICH DOOR?

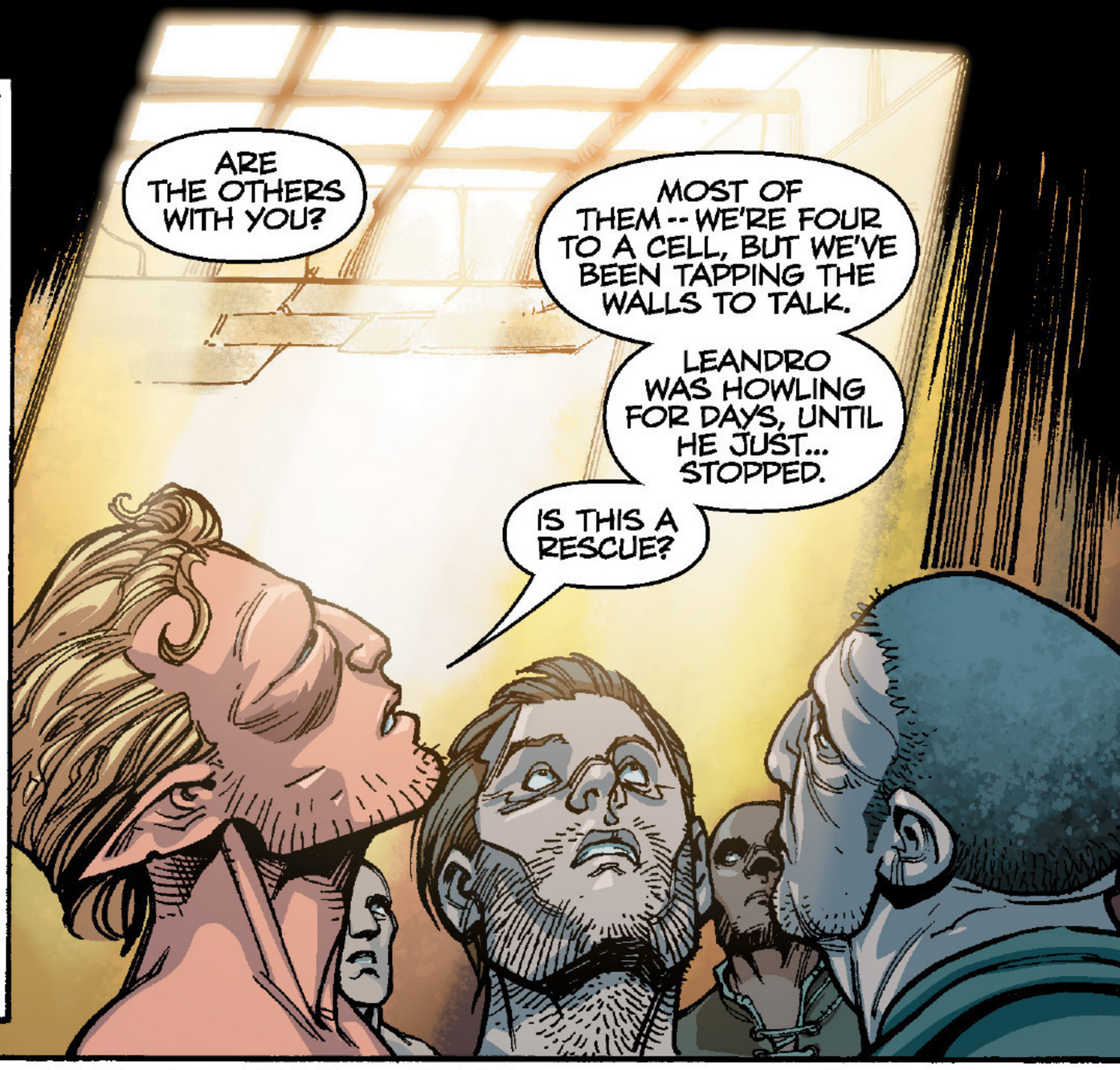
ONE THING AT A TIME.

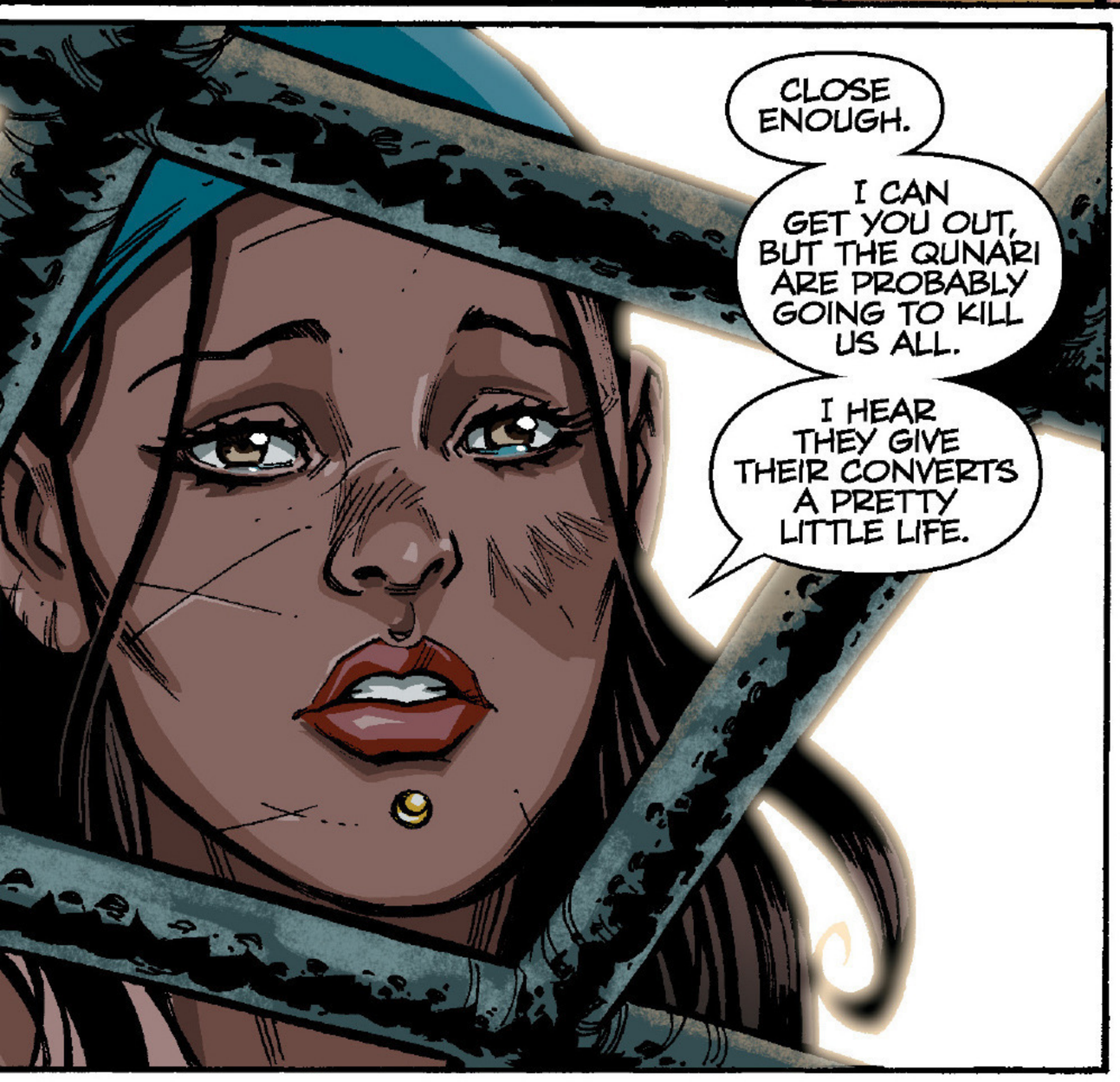
THEY'RE MY CREW, AND MY BLOODY RESPONSIBILITY.

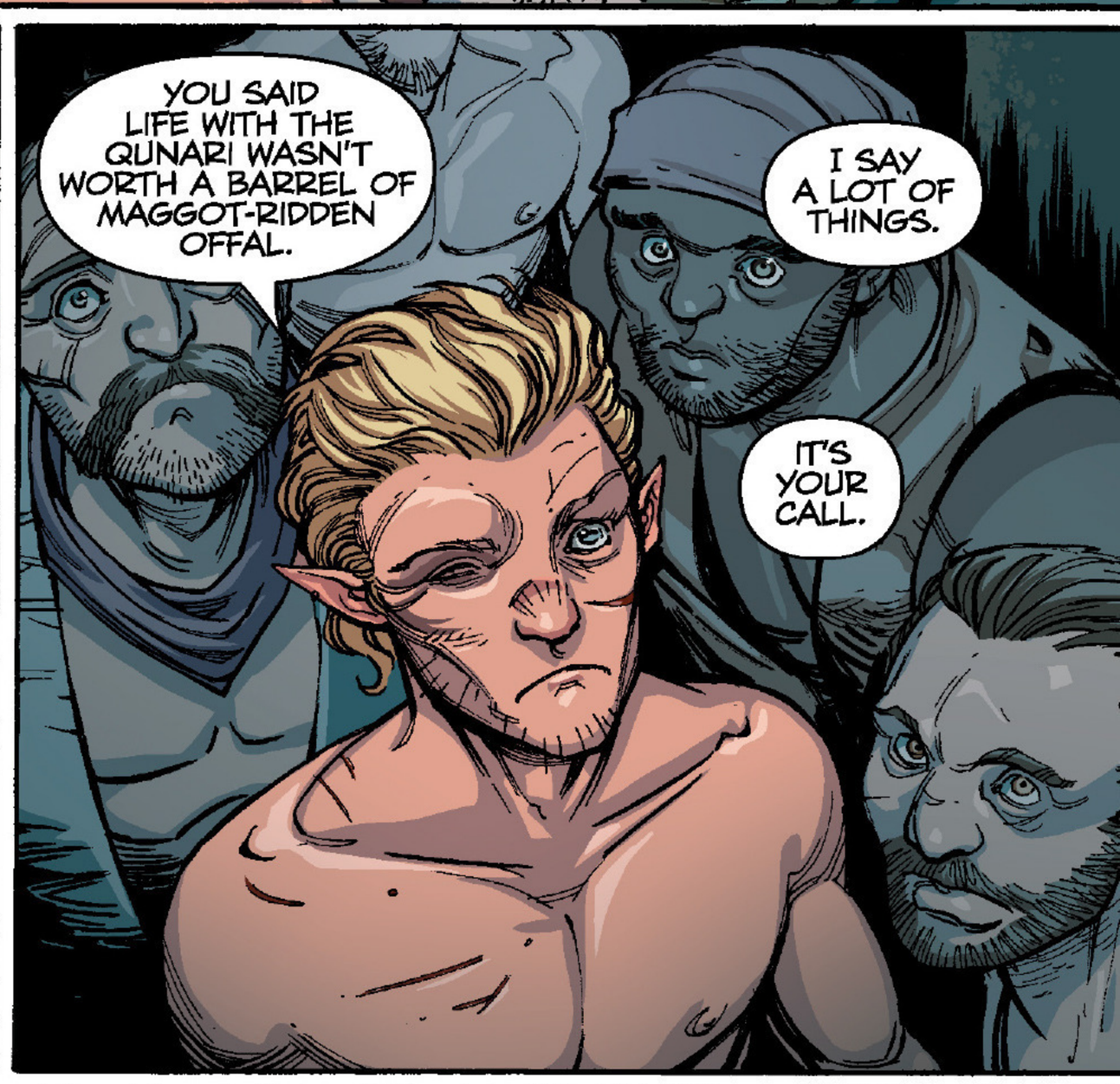
ON THREE...

WHATEVER ELSE I AM, I'M A *DAMN* GOOD CAPTAIN.

BRAND?
CAPTAIN?


ARE THE OTHERS WITH YOU?
MOST OF THEM -- WE'RE FOUR TO A CELL, BUT WE'VE BEEN TAPPING THE WALLS TO TALK.
LEANDRO WAS HOWLING FOR DAYS, UNTIL HE JUST... STOPPED.
IS THIS A RESCUE?


CLOSE ENOUGH.
I CAN GET YOU OUT, BUT THE QUNARI ARE PROBABLY GOING TO KILL US ALL.
I HEAR THEY GIVE THEIR CONVERTS A PRETTY LITTLE LIFE.


YOU SAID LIFE WITH THE QUNARI WASN'T WORTH A BARREL OF MAGGOT-RIDDEN OFFAL.
I SAY A LOT OF THINGS.
IT'S YOUR CALL.

GET US OUT.
WE'LL FIGHT TO THE END.

THAT'S MY BOY.

THIS HAS GOT TO BE A WAY--
-- OUT.
PARSHARRA.
YOU WILL NOT BE PERMITTED TO LEAVE.
STEN, IT DOESN'T HAVE TO HAPPEN LIKE THIS.
TITUS IS OUR MUTUAL ENEMY -- WE CAN WORK TOGETHER!
I AM NO LONGER STEN.

AND HERE YOU ARE.
YOU'RE MISSING A GOON.
MAYBE TWO?
THEY BELIEVED YOU WOULD TRY TO ESCAPE.
I KNEW BETTER.
YOU DON'T KNOW ME AT ALL.
YOUR GUILT WOULD HAVE YOU THROW YOURSELF ON THE PYRE RATHER THAN FLEE.
A WASTE, WHEN YOU COULD BE SO MUCH MORE.
I'D RATHER BE DEAD THAN LIKE YOU.
SO BE IT.

MOVE!
YOU'RE NOT MUCH HELP.
WHERE'S BIANCA WHEN YOU NEED HER...?

ENOUGH, CHILD!

WHOOPS.
I ONCE ADMIRED YOUR DETER-MINATION--
--YOUR STRUGGLE AGAINST A DISEASED WORLD.
NOW I SEE THAT IT HAS INFECTED YOU.

YOUR ARISHOK CHALLENGED HIM TO A DUEL -- MADE A BIG SPEECH AND EVERYTHING.
CALLED HIM *BASALIT-AN*?
I WOULDN'T INTERFERE IF *I* WERE YOU.
HRRR!
YOU DO NOT EVEN KNOW...*WHY* YOU FIGHT--

YOU'D BETTER WIN THIS, OH KING.
-- AND SO THE CURE WE OFFER IS BEYOND YOU.
"DO NOT WEEP FOR THE ANIMAL THAT THINKS ITSELF A MAN."

RRAAH!
...YOUR NAME...
...BEFORE YOU DIE, I WILL RIP IT FROM YOUR TONGUE...

LET IT BE DONE.

MY NAME WAS *NAISHE*.
IT'S NOT ANYMORE.
I'M NOT GOING TO KILL YOU.
WE WERE ALLIES ONCE, STEN -- WE COULD BE AGAIN.

YOUR PEOPLE AND MINE, AGAINST TITUS.
MAREVAS.
YOU HAVE PROVEN YOUR METTLE -- AGAIN.
I... AGREE TO YOUR OFFER.

WHEN THEY FOUND ME WITH MY CREW, WE WERE LOCKING THE PRIESTESS UP IN ONE OF HER OWN CELLS.
TURNS OUT WE DIDN'T NEED TO -- THE ARISHOK'S DECLARATION SPREAD FAST -- BUT IT WAS SATISFYING TO WATCH HER SQUIRM.
YOU SURE THIS THING WILL FLOAT?
"THE QUNARI WASTE NOTHING" -- EVEN THE WRECK OF AN ENEMY SHIP.
THEY HAULED IT IN TO TEAR IT APART.
I MADE SURE THEY FIXED IT.
HAD GOLD HIDDEN IN THE WOODWORK, DID YOU?
MAYBE.
YOU WORRIED YOU MADE A MISTAKE?
TWO DREADNOUGHTS SAIL BEHIND US.
THE KING OF FERELDEN BEARS THE STRENGTH OF HIS PEOPLE.
IF TITUS DEFEATS US BOTH, HE WILL HAVE EARNED HIS VICTORY.
WELL, AT LEAST IT'S OUT OF OUR HANDS.
YOU ASKED ME A QUESTION, KADAN -- YOU WISHED TO KNOW WHY TITUS WOULD POSSESS YOU.
THE BLOOD OF DRAGONS RUNS IN YOUR VEINS.
I'M...SURE THAT HAS TO BE SOME KIND OF MISTAKE.
IT IS...A TROUBLING THEORY.
A THEORY YOU'RE GOING TO TELL ME ABOUT?
I WILL TRY.
IT MAY TAKE SOME TIME.
LOVELY -- THEN THAT'LL HAVE TO DO FOR NOW.
READY, ISABELA?

READY TO GO.
BUT I'M NOT SURE I'M ISABELA ANY LONGER.
ERR... WHAT?
IT'S ONLY A NAME, YOU SEE.
I'M LOOKING AT ALL MY OPTIONS.
ONCE VARRIC GOT ME ALONE, HE ASKED IF I WANTED TO GO ON -- IF MAYBE THIS WAS MORE THAN I SIGNED ON FOR.
I TOLD HIM ALISTAIR DESERVED A CHANCE TO KILL TITUS AND FIND HIS FATHER, AND THAT I INTENDED TO SEE IT THROUGH.
AFTER THAT?
THERE ARE GOING TO BE SOME CHANGES.
THE END

ILLUSTRATION BY
ANTHONY PALUMBO

CHAPTER 1

THE WICKEDEST MAN IN ALL PERIVANTIUM WAS KNOWN FOR STEALING ***CHILDREN*** OFF THE STREET AND SELLING THEM AS ***SLAVES.***

WE'LL CALL HIM...OH, LET'S SAY *"ARTHUR."*

ARTHUR HAD GROWN UP WITH A MOTHER WHO LOVED PUPPIES AND PUT EXTRA APRICOTS IN HIS OATMEAL, BUT THAT DIDN'T STOP ARTHUR FROM KIDNAPPING AND THIEVING.

BEING AN ESPECIALLY ***BAD*** MAN, ARTHUR CAME TO THE ATTENTION OF AN ESPECIALLY ***WICKED*** MAGE -- AURELIAN TITUS, A MAGISTER OF THE TEVINTER IMPERIUM.

"ARTHUR," TITUS SAID. *"I WANT YOU TO BE AN ENFORCER FOR MY EVIL CULT, AND TOGETHER, WE CAN RULE THE WORLD!"*

ARTHUR AGREED. BAD PEOPLE ARE DUMB THAT WAY.

SO ARTHUR LEFT PERIVANTIUM, AND MADE THE LONG JOURNEY TO THE ANCIENT FORTRESS OF ATH VELANIS.
ATH VELANIS HAD FALLEN INTO RUIN, BUT THE BLOOD MAGE TITUS HAD CHOSEN IT AS HIS HEADQUARTERS -- IT WAS A PLACE WITH A DARK AND TERRIBLE HISTORY.
SHOULD'VE WORN GLOVES...
WHEN IT WAS BUILT, ATH VELANIS WAS USED BY MALGORTHIOS THE BLACK AS A PLACE OF SACRIFICE TO SEND WOMEN SCREAMING TO THE OLD GODS.
IN THE CENTURIES BEFORE ITS ADOPTION BY AURELIAN TITUS, IT HOUSED MADMEN, DEMONS, AND THE FRATERNITY OF THE GRINNING ABOMINATION.
ARTHUR FIT IN PERFECTLY.
UNTIL ONE DAY, A DWARF -- HIS HEART PURE, HIS INTENTIONS JUST, AND HIS QUARRELS SHARP -- CAME TO ATH VELANIS WITH HIS NOBLE COMPATRIOTS.
BRAVEST OF HIS BRAVE BAND, THE DWARF ENTERED THE DARK FORTRESS ALONE.
ALL OF YOU, BE READY!

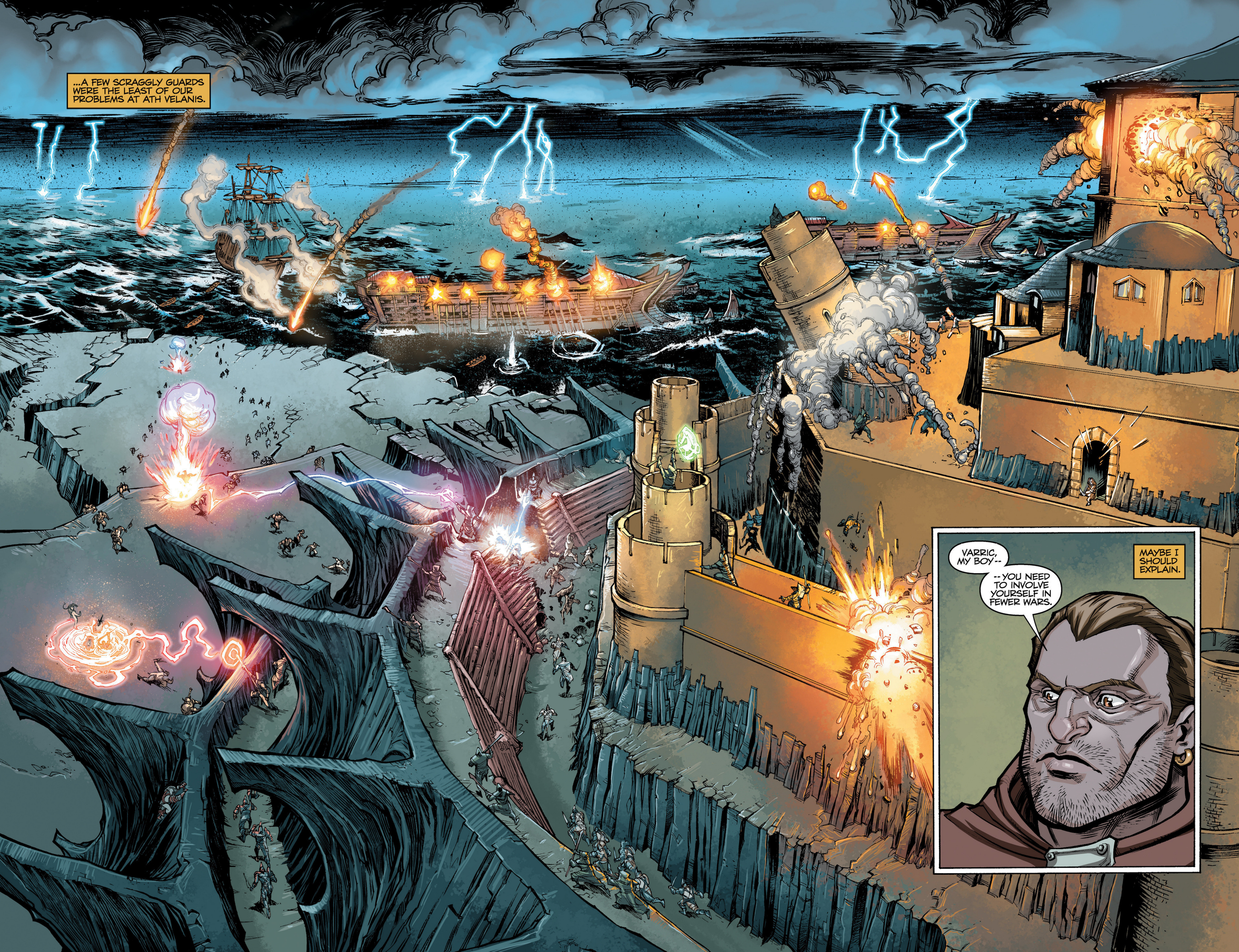
THE CRIMSON ACOLYTES ARE PREPARING A DEFENSE, BUT THERE'S NO TIME.

NICON, FESTUS -- WITH ME!

QUICKLY!

WHEN THE DWARF CAME FOR HIM, HE SHOUTED VILE THINGS AND CHARGED.
"FOR ALL THAT IS WICKED!" HE CRIED. "FOR TITUS!"
BUT THE DWARF WORE A MAGIC VEST THAT TURNED ASIDE ARTHUR'S BLADE, AND ARTHUR SLIPPED UPON HIS OWN SWORD.
WICKED ARTHUR WAS DEAD, MOURNED BY NO ONE.
BAD TIME TO JAM, BIANCA...
NOW, YOU MAY BE ASKING, "HOW DO YOU KNOW ALL THIS, VARRIC?"

TO WHICH I SAY: DO YOU WANT A DIFFERENT STORY?
DO YOU WANT TO FEEL SAD FOR A LUCKLESS, NAMELESS THUG WHO JOINED THE WRONG CULT?
OR DO YOU WANT TO ACCEPT THAT ARTHUR THE WICKED HAD TO DIE, AND MOVE ALONG?
AFTER ALL...


...A FEW SCRAGGLY GUARDS WERE THE LEAST OF OUR PROBLEMS AT ATH VELANIS.
VARRIC, MY BOY--
--YOU NEED TO INVOLVE YOURSELF IN FEWER WARS.
MAYBE I SHOULD EXPLAIN.

WE'D BEEN PREPARING FOR BATTLE FOR WEEKS.

THE COMMANDER OF OUR FLEET WAS THE *MIGHTIEST* OF THE PIRATE QUEENS.

ONCE, SHE HAD BEEN CALLED ISABELA.

NOW SHE SEEMED TO PREFER *"CAPTAIN."*

BEFORE WE'D MADE ALLIES OF THE QUNARI, THEY HAD SINGLED HER OUT AS A PRISONER FOR *CONVERSION.*

SHE WORE HER SCARS WELL.

WISHING YOU HAD ONE OF THOSE SHIPS?

THINKING ABOUT WHAT I ALMOST *PAID* FOR ONE OF THOSE SHIPS.

YOU NEVER USED TO GIVE THE PAST MUCH THOUGHT.

IF YOU WANT TO TALK, WE'VE GOT A LOT OF BORING SEA TO CROSS...

YOU'RE CUTE WHEN YOU GET PATERNAL.

HOW IS IT YOU DON'T HAVE ANY DWARFLETS RUNNING AROUND?

RIGHT.

SHALL WE CHECK ON OUR GUESTS?

YOU THINK THEY'RE KILLING EACH OTHER?
WE SHOULD BE SO LUCKY.
IN THE SHIP'S GREAT AND GILDED CONFERENCE HALL, A MEETING OF KINGS WAS TAKING PLACE.
THE ARISHOK IS THE LEADER OF THE QUNARI.
(IT'S MORE COMPLICATED, BUT DON'T ASK ME FOR THE DETAILS.)
THIS ARISHOK HAPPENED TO BE AN OLD COMRADE OF KING ALISTAIR THEIRIN, THE MAN WHO'D STARTED US ON THIS MAD QUEST.
NO MORE SECRETS, THEN.
THE BLOOD MAGE AURELIAN TITUS HAD CAPTURED ALISTAIR'S FATHER, THE LOST KING MARIC. NOW HE WANTED ALISTAIR, TOO.
THE QUNARI CLAIMED TO HAVE AN INKLING WHY.
YOU'RE IN TIME.
STEN -- THE ARISHOK, PARDON -- IS ABOUT TO EXPLAIN HIS THEORY.
AS I HAVE SAID --
THE BLOOD OF DRAGONS IS IN YOUR VEINS.
THAT IS WHY TITUS WANTS YOU.
KING OF FERELDEN, TEMPLAR, GREY WARDEN, AND NOW DRAGON BLOODED?
YOUR MAJESTY IS QUITE THE SPECIAL SNOWFLAKE.
THANK YOU, VARRIC.
HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE?
TELL ME.

AND THE ARISHOK RECITED HIS TALE.
YOUR CHANTRY WRITES OF KING CALENHAD THE GREAT, THE SILVER KNIGHT, FIRST OF HIS LINE AND FATHER OF YOUR FATHERS.
IN YOUR LEGENDS, HE IS WISE AND STRONG, A MAN WHO INSPIRED LOYALTY AS MUCH BY WORDS AS BY HIS SWORD.
BUT WE KNOW CALENHAD FOR WHAT HE WAS -- THE DOG-HANDLER WHO WOULD BE MORE.
DO NOT DOUBT THAT HE WAS CLEVER.
BUT HE WAS NOT WISE.
AND HIS STRENGTH WAS NOT HIS OWN.
HE WAS BORN INTO DESTITUTION -- IN THIS, OUR TALES AGREE -- BUT HE WAS ALWAYS AMBITIOUS.
CALENHAD STRUCK BARGAIN UPON BARGAIN, AND TRADED STORY FOR STORY...
...UNTIL AT LAST, WITH THE WORDS OF A BESOTTED SCRIBE, HE GAINED THE COIN HE NEEDED.
A SECRET HE MIGHT TRADE TO A WITCH, TO LEARN THE WAYS OF POWER.
THE WITCH SENT HIM TO A CAVE, WHERE ONE OF THE GREAT DRAGONS -- ANCIENT AND PROUD, ITS TIME NEARLY OVER -- LAY.
CALENHAD DID AS THE WITCH HAD INSTRUCTED.
CALENHAD PLUNGED HIS DAGGER INTO THE CREATURE AND FELT ITS HEAT.
AND CALENHAD DRANK.
AND HE GREW STRONG, UNTIL NONE COULD STAND AGAINST HIM.
THAT IS THE SECRET OF YOUR ANCIENT KINGS AND HEROES -- THE SOURCE OF THEIR POWER.
THAT IS HOW THEY CHANGED OUR WORLD.
AND THOUGH THE SECRET HAS FADED, THE BLOOD REMAINS IN YOU.
CALENHAD DRANK DRAGON BLOOD.
DISAPPOINTED?
HE'S A LEGEND -- HE MADE FERELDEN... FERELDEN.
COULDN'T HE JUST HAVE BEEN A HERO?
MAYBE HE WAS.
WE ALL HAVE OUR TRICKS -- AND I WOULDN'T TRUST THE QUNARI VERSION OF HIS LIFE.

SO MARIC AND I HAVE SOME DRAGON BLOOD -- A SMIDGEN.
WHAT DOES TITUS WANT WITH IT?
THE WITCH YAVANA SAID SHE NEEDED IT TO AWAKEN THE GREAT DRAGONS... IS THAT WHAT TITUS WANTS, TOO?
I DO NOT KNOW.
IF IT IS...IT MIGHT NOT EVEN WORK.
THE RITUAL THAT MADE ME A GREY WARDEN TAINTED MY BLOOD FOREVER.
YES -- DID YAVANA KNOW THAT?
DOES IT MATTER?
ENOUGH.
WE WILL REACH ATH VELANIS IN TWO DAYS.
MY DREADNOUGHTS WILL BOMBARD THE FORTRESS AND MY WARRIORS WILL HOLD THE SHORE FOR ONE HOUR -- THEN DEPART.
ALL ELSE IS IN YOUR HANDS.
DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE AFRAID?
WE ARE NOT FOOLS.
IF WE WERE, WE WOULD HAVE DIED AT ATH VELANIS LONG AGO.
WE HAVE TO GO INSIDE THE FORTRESS.
WE HAVE TO FIND MARIC.
THEN I WISH YOU LUCK, BASALIT-AN.

AND THAT'S HOW WE CAME TO OUR LATEST DISASTER: A FRONTAL ASSAULT AGAINST IMPOSSIBLE ODDS.

KING ALISTAIR'S PLAN WAS BRILLIANT IN ITS OBLIVIOUS SIMPLICITY.

I LOST SIGHT OF VARRIC.

IS HE--?

ON HIS WAY INSIDE, IF HE'S NOT THERE ALREADY.

CAN WE STOP LURING OUT GUARDS, NOW?

WE CAN *TRY*-- JUST DON'T GET YOUR HOPES UP.

ALISTAIR--

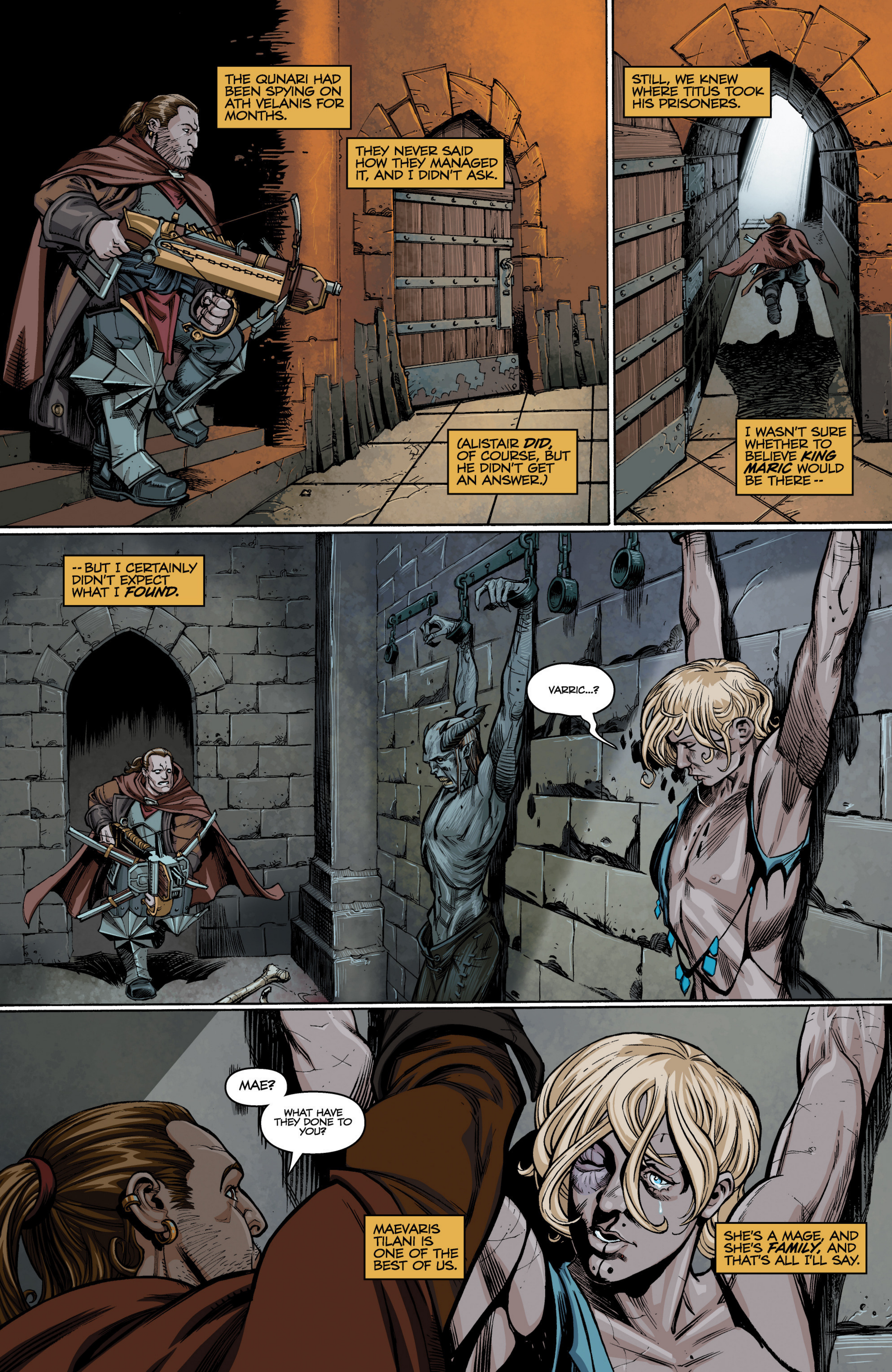
--EYES FRONT.

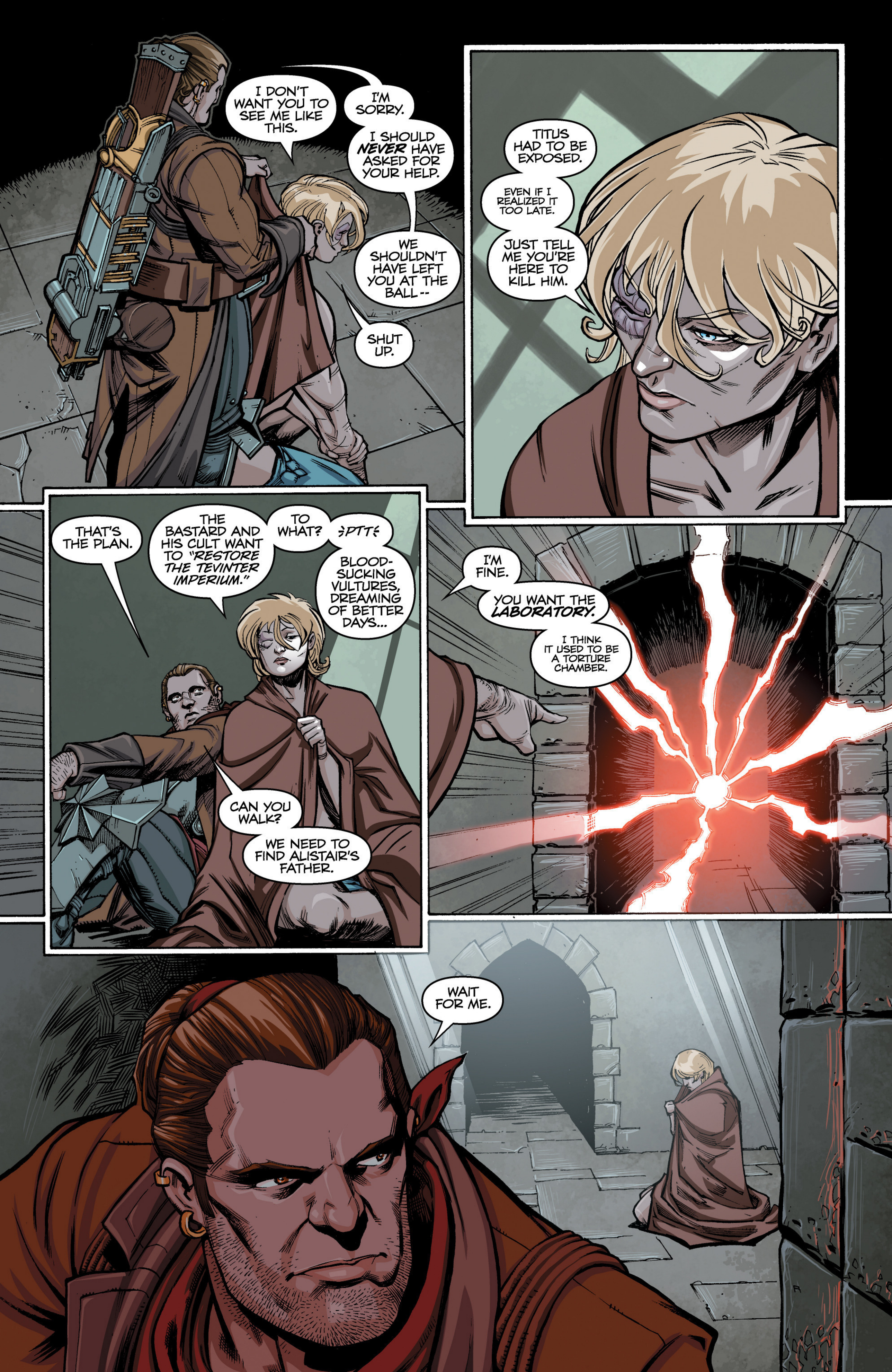
NO MATTER HOW STUNNING I LOOK IN BLOOD.

YOU SEEK ME?
YOU HAVE FOUND ME.
TITUS...
BEFORE, IN TEVINTER.
YOUR EYES WERE AFRAID.
BE AFRAID AGAIN.

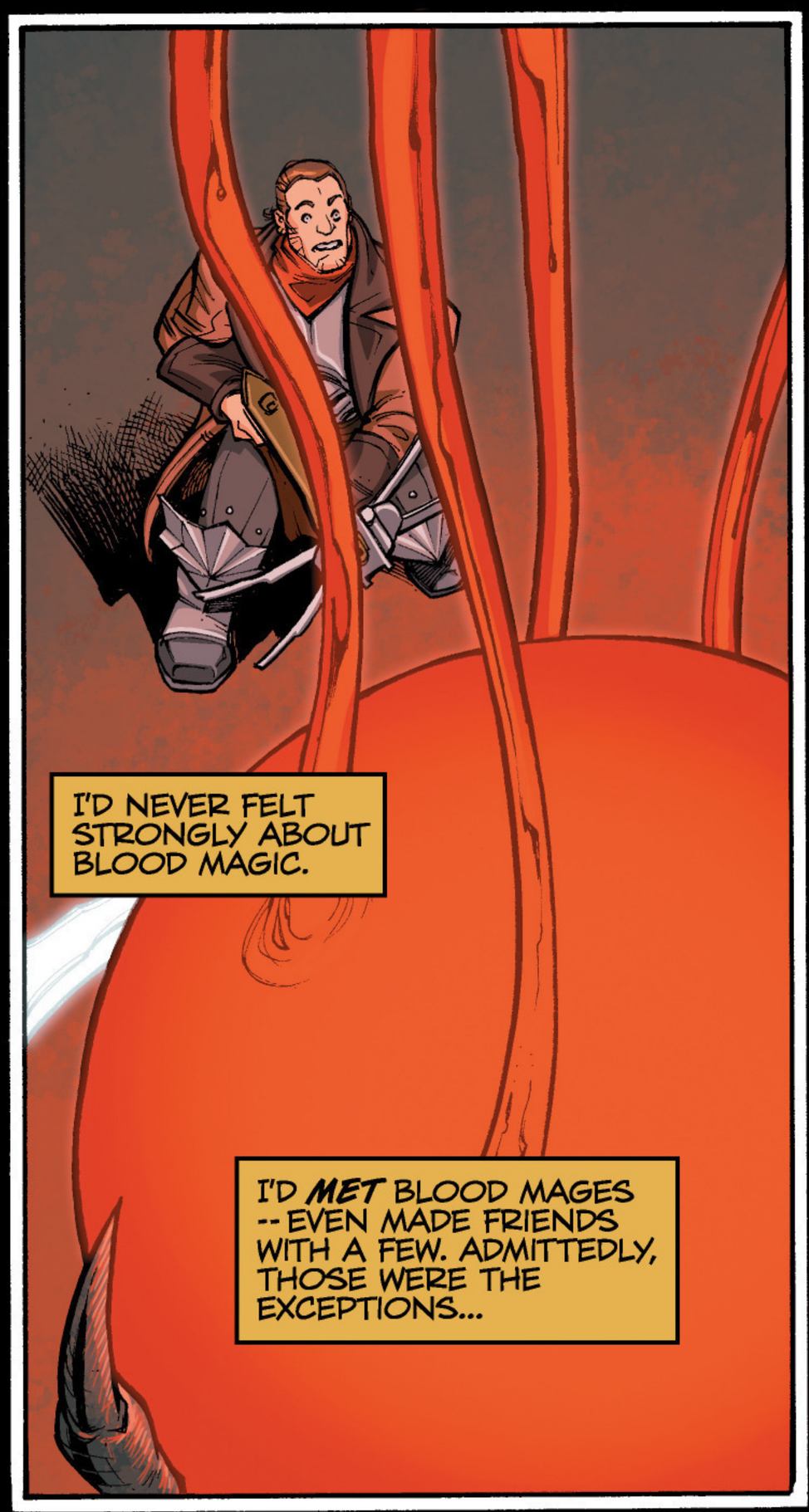
WAIT!
DRAGONFIRE.
IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN THEIR BIRTHRIGHT.
INSTEAD IT KILLS.

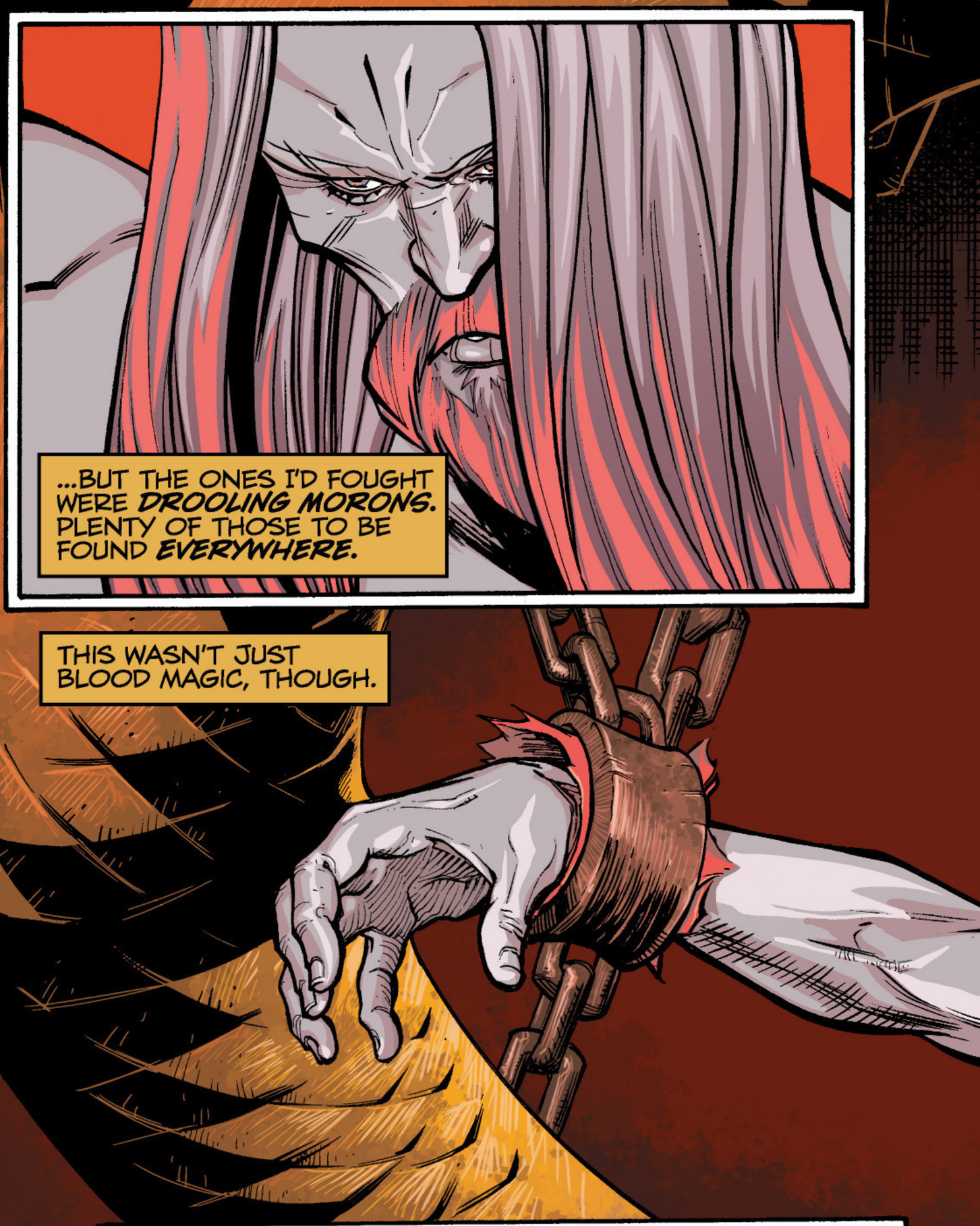
BASTARD!
YOUR FATHER'S BLOOD SERVES.
AS WILL YOURS.
FOR THE IMPERIUM.
RUN?
NOT A CHANCE.


THE QUNARI HAD BEEN SPYING ON ATH VELANIS FOR MONTHS.
THEY NEVER SAID HOW THEY MANAGED IT, AND I DIDN'T ASK.
(ALISTAIR DID, OF COURSE, BUT HE DIDN'T GET AN ANSWER.)
STILL, WE KNEW WHERE TITUS TOOK HIS PRISONERS.
I WASN'T SURE WHETHER TO BELIEVE KING MARIC WOULD BE THERE --
-- BUT I CERTAINLY DIDN'T EXPECT WHAT I FOUND.
VARRIC...?
MAE?
WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO YOU?
MAEVARIS TILANI IS ONE OF THE BEST OF US.
SHE'S A MAGE, AND SHE'S FAMILY, AND THAT'S ALL I'LL SAY.

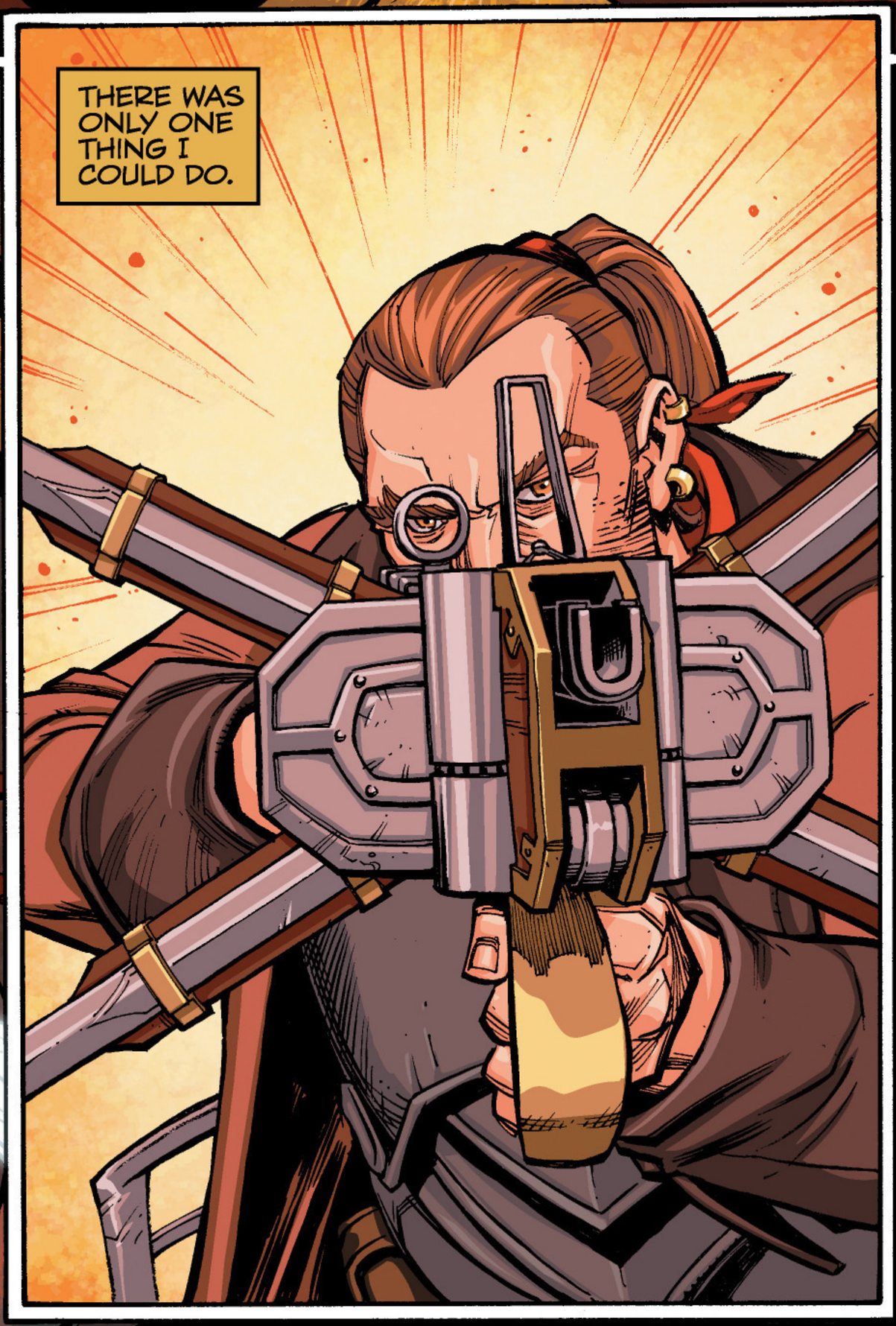

I DON'T WANT YOU TO SEE ME LIKE THIS.
I'M SORRY.
I SHOULD NEVER HAVE ASKED FOR YOUR HELP.
WE SHOULDN'T HAVE LEFT YOU AT THE BALL--
SHUT UP.
TITUS HAD TO BE EXPOSED.
EVEN IF I REALIZED IT TOO LATE.
JUST TELL ME YOU'RE HERE TO KILL HIM.
THAT'S THE PLAN.
THE BASTARD AND HIS CULT WANT TO "RESTORE THE TEVINTER IMPERIUM."
TO WHAT?
PTT
BLOOD-SUCKING VULTURES, DREAMING OF BETTER DAYS...
CAN YOU WALK?
WE NEED TO FIND ALISTAIR'S FATHER.
I'M FINE.
YOU WANT THE LABORATORY.
I THINK IT USED TO BE A TORTURE CHAMBER.
WAIT FOR ME.

NO.
KING MARIC?

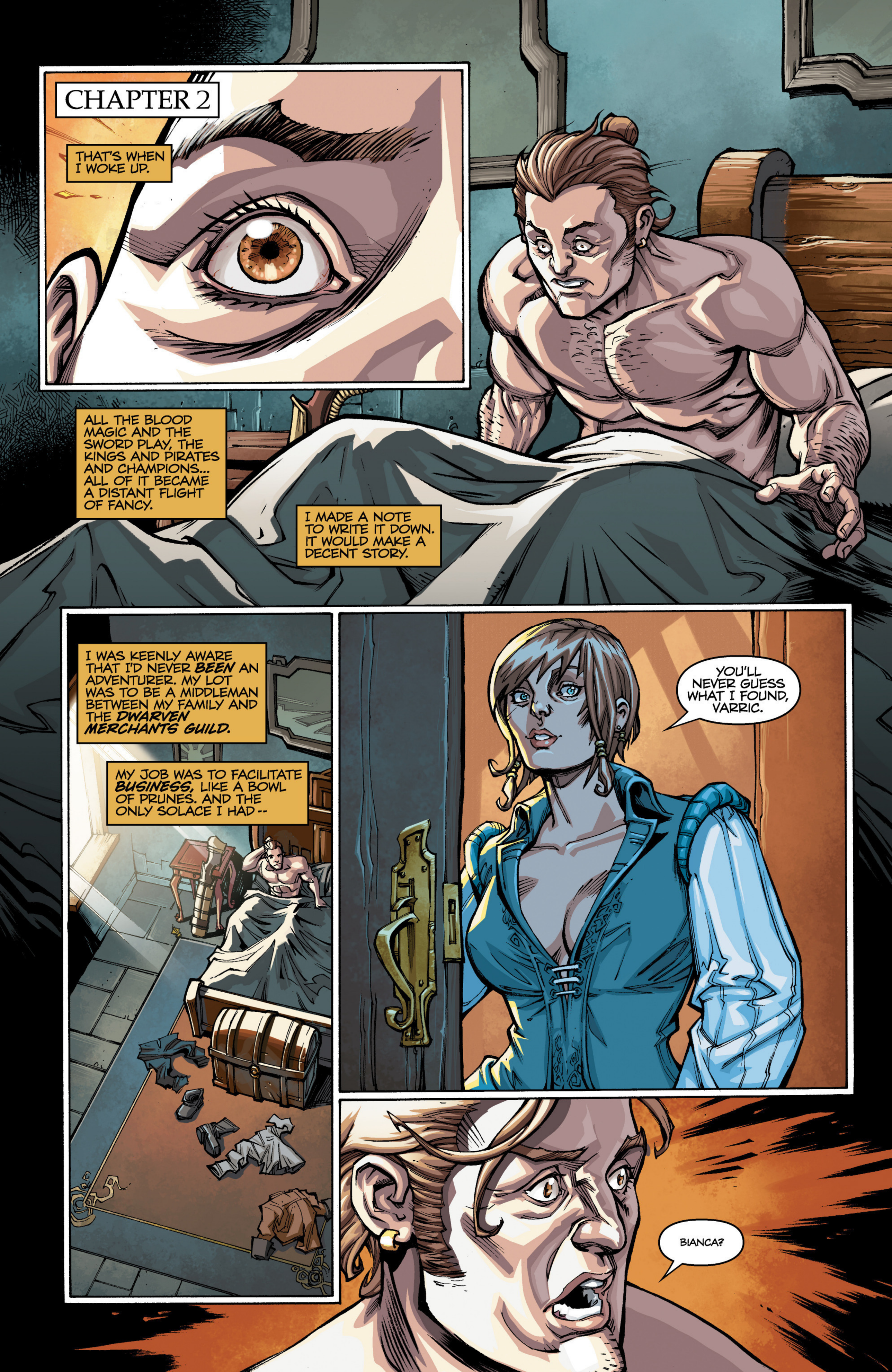

I'D NEVER FELT STRONGLY ABOUT BLOOD MAGIC.
I'D *MET* BLOOD MAGES -- EVEN MADE FRIENDS WITH A FEW. ADMITTEDLY, THOSE WERE THE EXCEPTIONS...

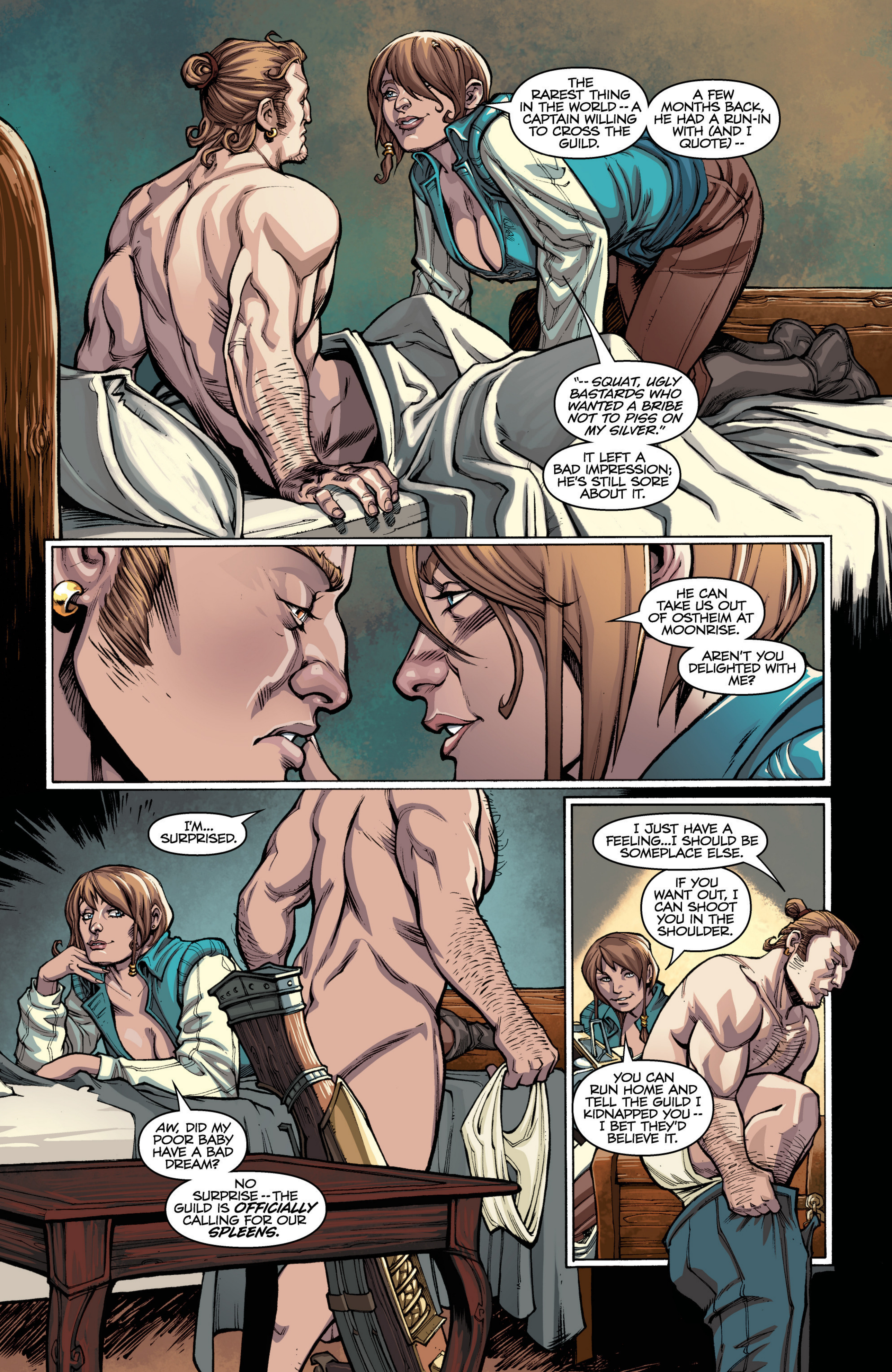

...BUT THE ONES I'D FOUGHT WERE *DROOLING MORONS.* PLENTY OF THOSE TO BE FOUND *EVERYWHERE.*
THIS WASN'T JUST BLOOD MAGIC, THOUGH.

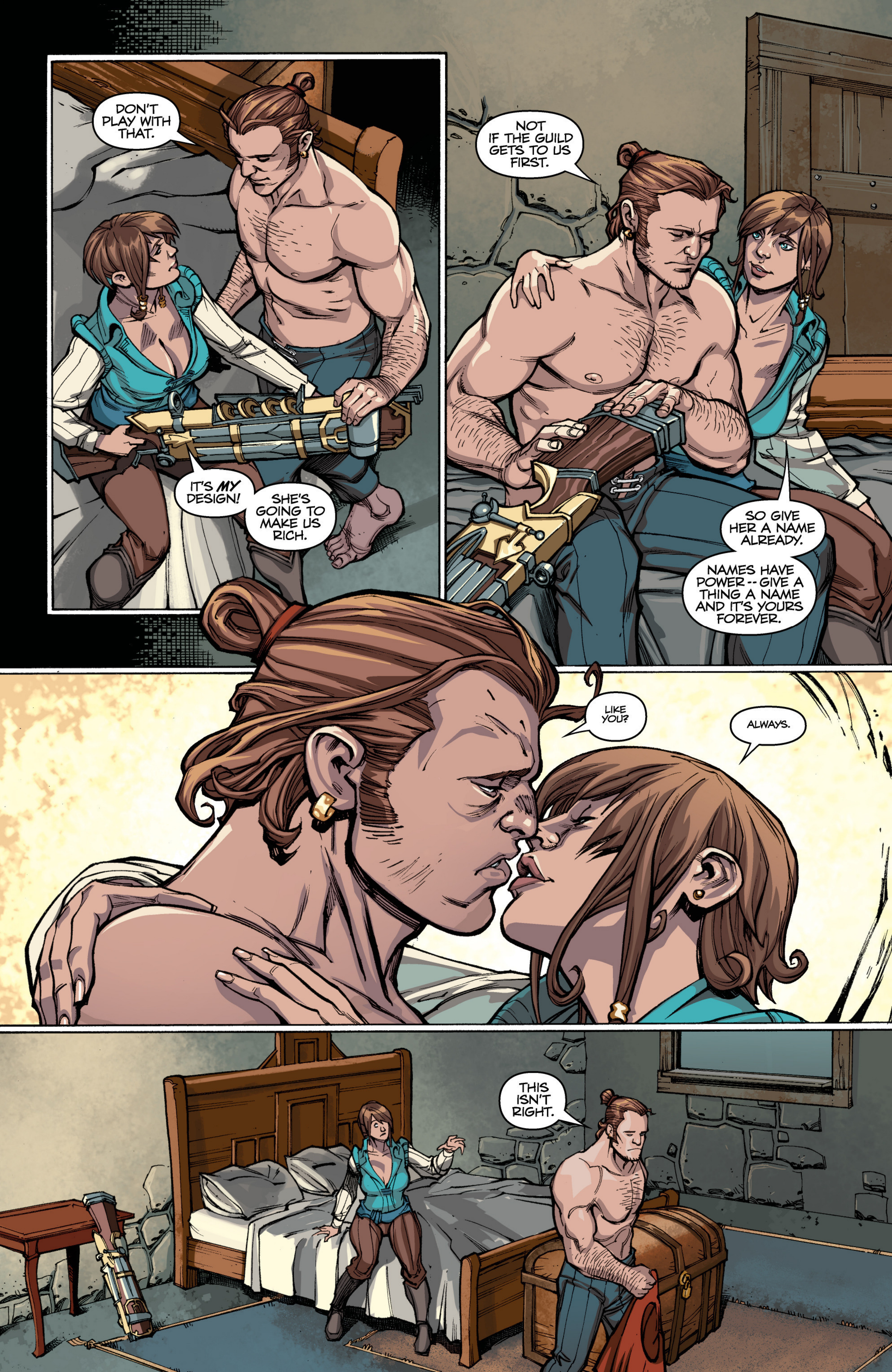
THIS WAS SOMETHING EVIL.

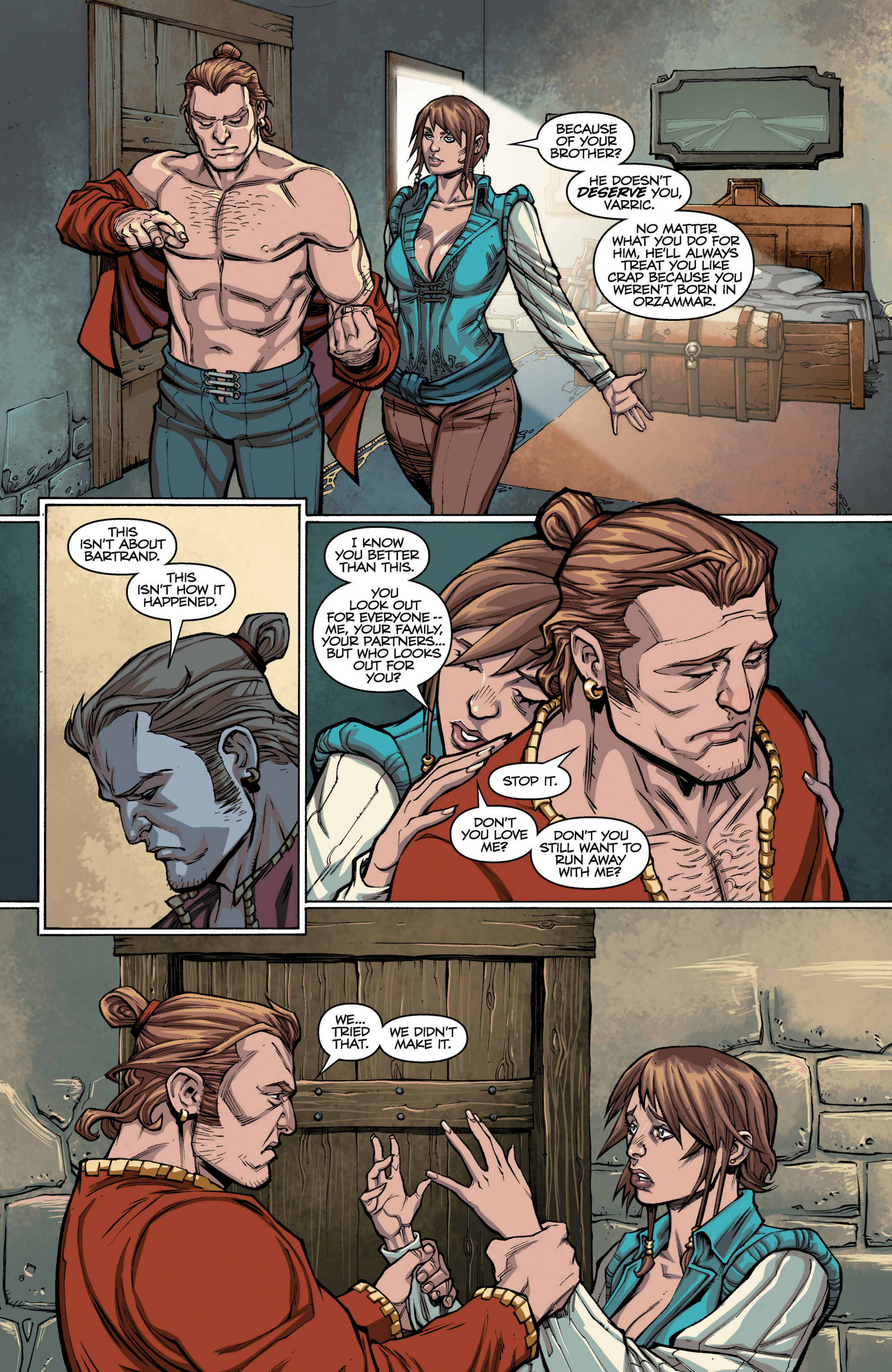

THERE WAS ONLY ONE THING I COULD DO.

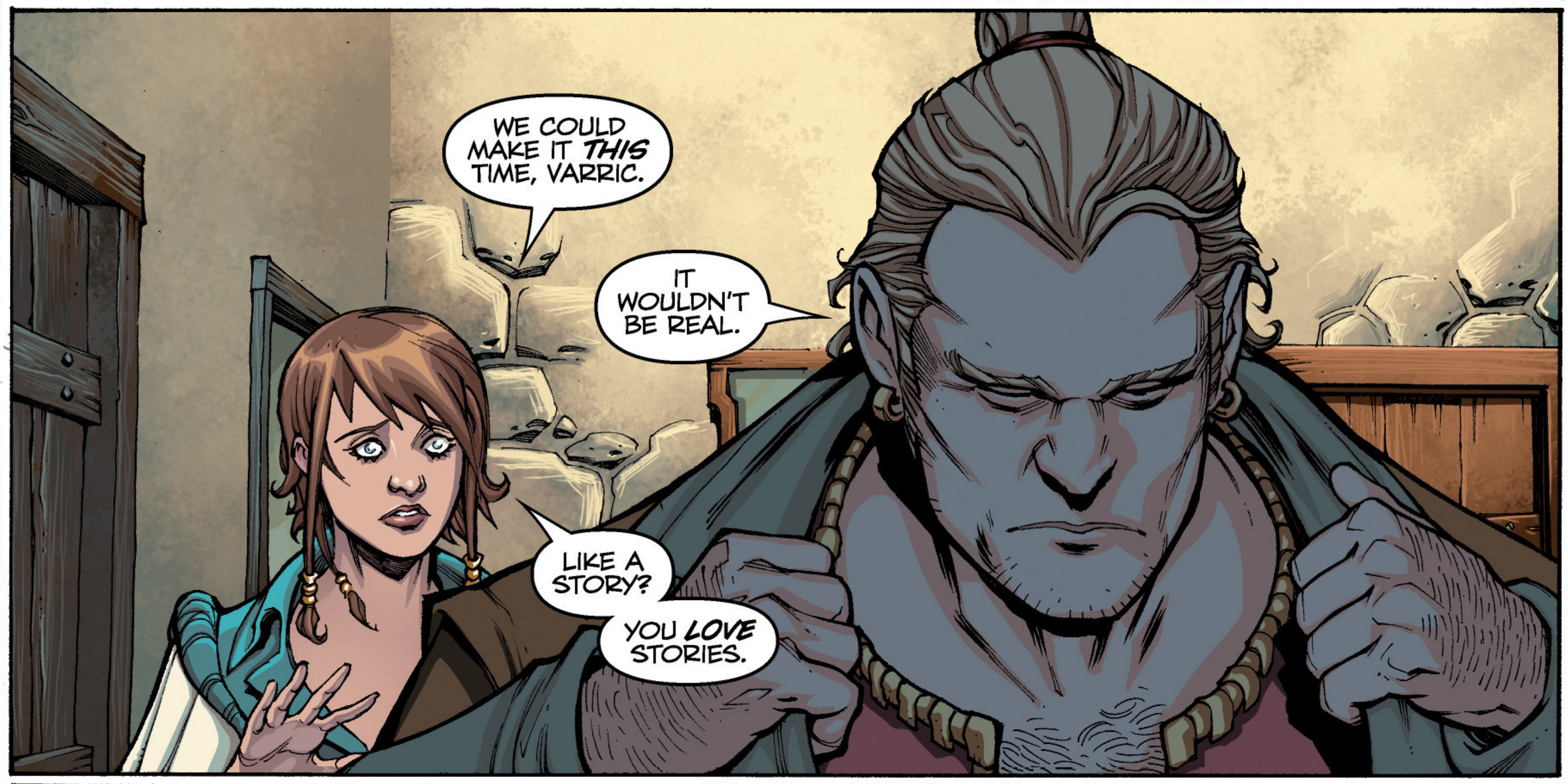
ON THE WHOLE, I'VE MADE BETTER DECISIONS.


CHAPTER 2
THAT'S WHEN I WOKE UP.
ALL THE BLOOD MAGIC AND THE SWORD PLAY, THE KINGS AND PIRATES AND CHAMPIONS... ALL OF IT BECAME A DISTANT FLIGHT OF FANCY.
I MADE A NOTE TO WRITE IT DOWN. IT WOULD MAKE A DECENT STORY.
I WAS KEENLY AWARE THAT I'D NEVER BEEN AN ADVENTURER. MY LOT WAS TO BE A MIDDLEMAN BETWEEN MY FAMILY AND THE DWARVEN MERCHANTS GUILD.
MY JOB WAS TO FACILITATE BUSINESS, LIKE A BOWL OF PRUNES. AND THE ONLY SOLACE I HAD --
YOU'LL NEVER GUESS WHAT I FOUND, VARRIC.
BIANCA?

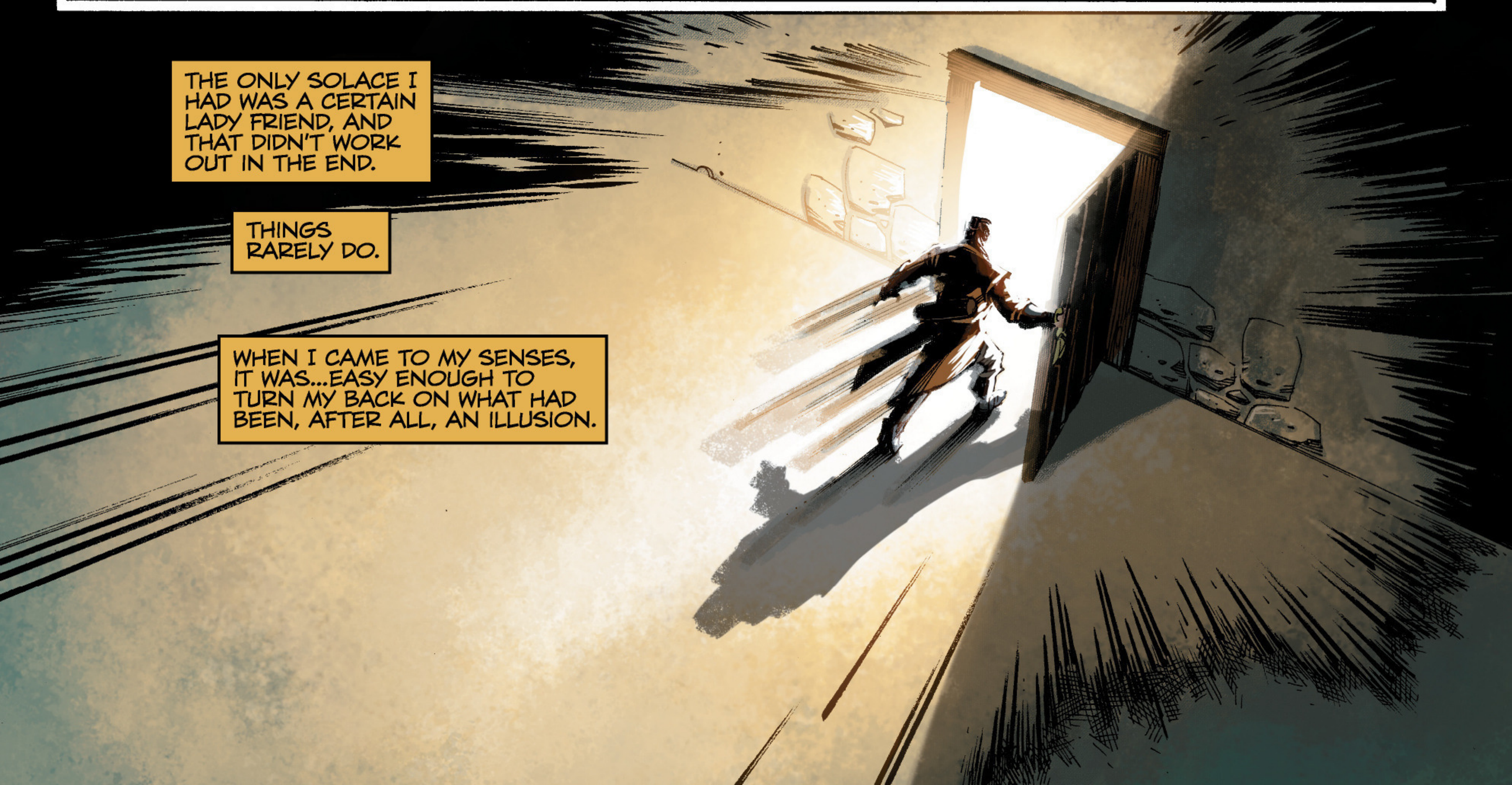

THE RAREST THING IN THE WORLD -- A CAPTAIN WILLING TO CROSS THE GUILD.
A FEW MONTHS BACK, HE HAD A RUN-IN WITH (AND I QUOTE) --
"-- SQUAT, UGLY BASTARDS WHO WANTED A BRIBE NOT TO PISS ON MY SILVER."
IT LEFT A BAD IMPRESSION; HE'S STILL SORE ABOUT IT.
HE CAN TAKE US OUT OF OSTHEIM AT MOONRISE.
AREN'T YOU DELIGHTED WITH ME?
I'M... SURPRISED.
AW, DID MY POOR BABY HAVE A BAD DREAM?
NO SURPRISE -- THE GUILD IS OFFICIALLY CALLING FOR OUR SPLEENS.
I JUST HAVE A FEELING...I SHOULD BE SOMEPLACE ELSE.
IF YOU WANT OUT, I CAN SHOOT YOU IN THE SHOULDER.
YOU CAN RUN HOME AND TELL THE GUILD I KIDNAPPED YOU -- I BET THEY'D BELIEVE IT.

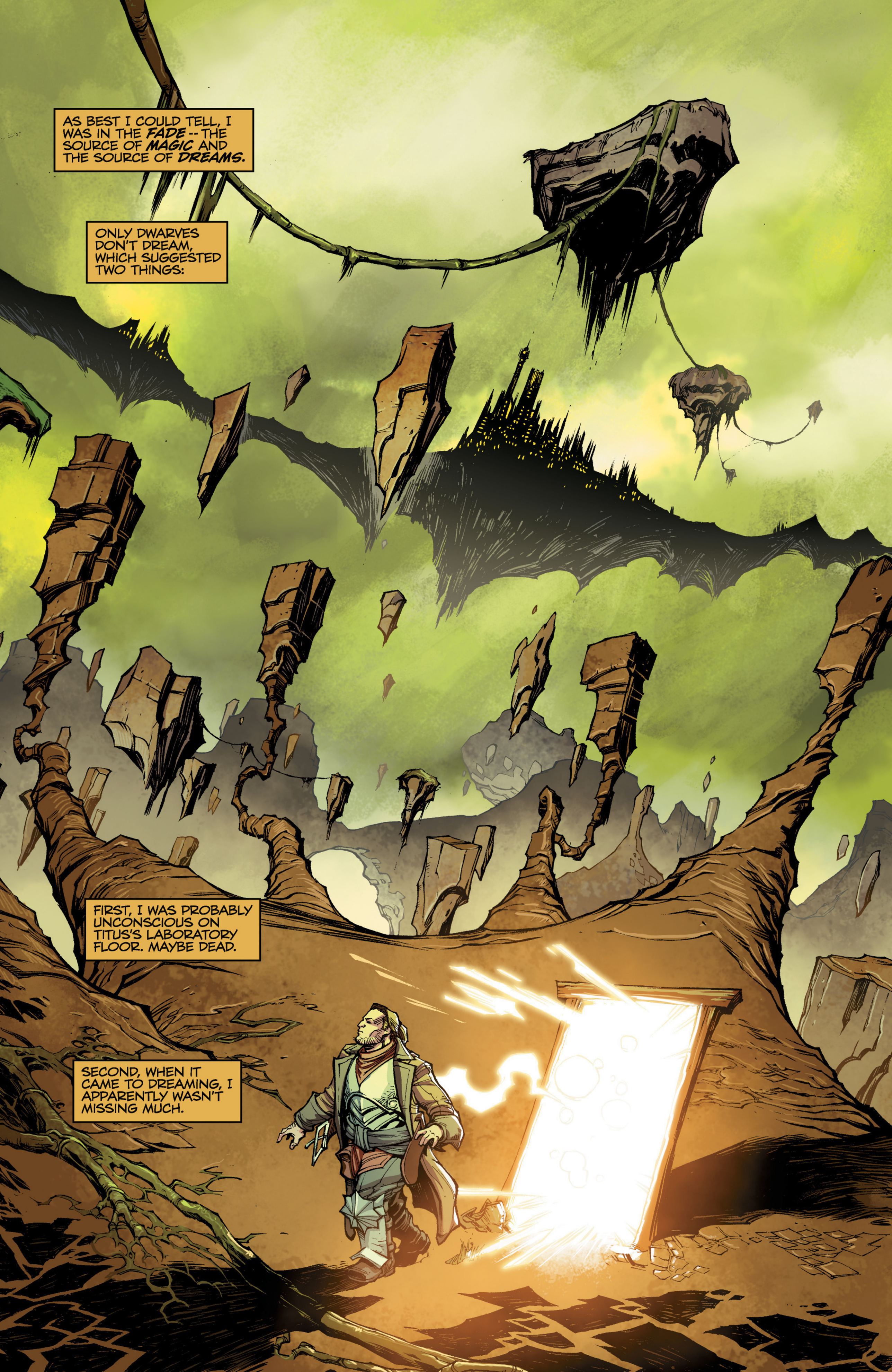

DON'T PLAY WITH THAT.
IT'S MY DESIGN!
SHE'S GOING TO MAKE US RICH.
NOT IF THE GUILD GETS TO US FIRST.
SO GIVE HER A NAME ALREADY.
NAMES HAVE POWER -- GIVE A THING A NAME AND IT'S YOURS FOREVER.
LIKE YOU?
ALWAYS.
THIS ISN'T RIGHT.

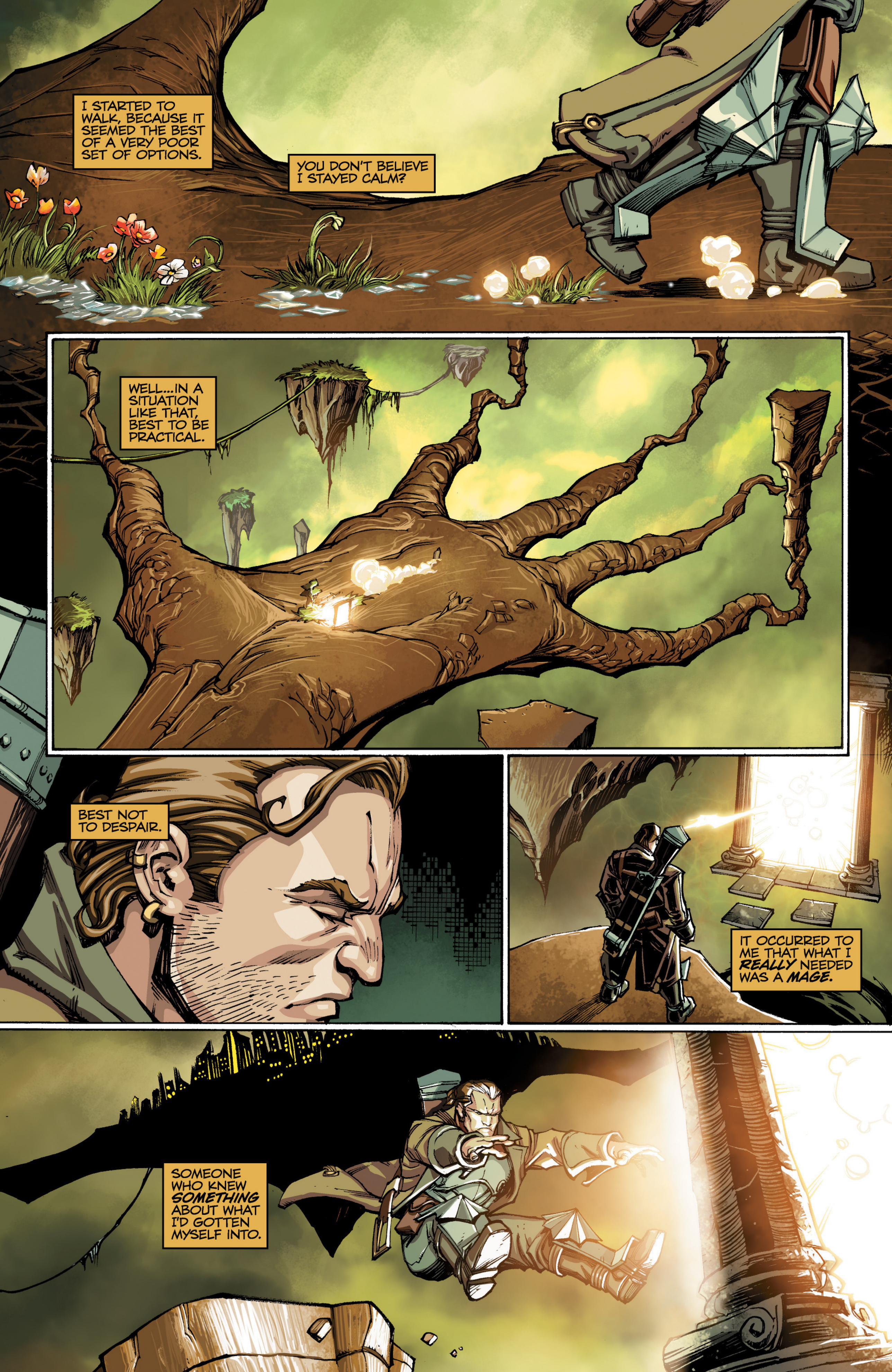

BECAUSE OF YOUR BROTHER?
HE DOESN'T DESERVE YOU, VARRIC.
NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO FOR HIM, HE'LL ALWAYS TREAT YOU LIKE CRAP BECAUSE YOU WEREN'T BORN IN ORZAMMAR.
THIS ISN'T ABOUT BARTRAND.
THIS ISN'T HOW IT HAPPENED.
I KNOW YOU BETTER THAN THIS.
YOU LOOK OUT FOR EVERYONE -- ME, YOUR FAMILY, YOUR PARTNERS... BUT WHO LOOKS OUT FOR YOU?
STOP IT.
DON'T YOU LOVE ME?
DON'T YOU STILL WANT TO RUN AWAY WITH ME?
WE... TRIED THAT.
WE DIDN'T MAKE IT.


WE COULD MAKE IT THIS TIME, VARRIC.
IT WOULDN'T BE REAL.
LIKE A STORY?
YOU LOVE STORIES.

NOT AS MUCH AS I LOVED YOU.


THE ONLY SOLACE I HAD WAS A CERTAIN LADY FRIEND, AND THAT DIDN'T WORK OUT IN THE END.
THINGS RARELY DO.
WHEN I CAME TO MY SENSES, IT WAS...EASY ENOUGH TO TURN MY BACK ON WHAT HAD BEEN, AFTER ALL, AN ILLUSION.


AS BEST I COULD TELL, I WAS IN THE *FADE* -- THE SOURCE OF *MAGIC* AND THE SOURCE OF *DREAMS*.
ONLY DWARVES DON'T DREAM, WHICH SUGGESTED TWO THINGS:
FIRST, I WAS PROBABLY UNCONSCIOUS ON TITUS'S LABORATORY FLOOR. MAYBE DEAD.
SECOND, WHEN IT CAME TO DREAMING, I APPARENTLY WASN'T MISSING MUCH.


I STARTED TO WALK, BECAUSE IT SEEMED THE BEST OF A VERY POOR SET OF OPTIONS.
YOU DON'T BELIEVE I STAYED CALM?
WELL...IN A SITUATION LIKE THAT, BEST TO BE PRACTICAL.
BEST NOT TO DESPAIR.
IT OCCURRED TO ME THAT WHAT I REALLY NEEDED WAS A MAGE.
SOMEONE WHO KNEW SOMETHING ABOUT WHAT I'D GOTTEN MYSELF INTO.

IT'S THE NATURE OF THE FADE TO GUIDE YOU TOWARD YOUR DESIRE.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE -- NAME OF ANDERS -- MENTIONED THAT ONCE, IN BETWEEN FROTHY RANTS ABOUT TEMPLARS.

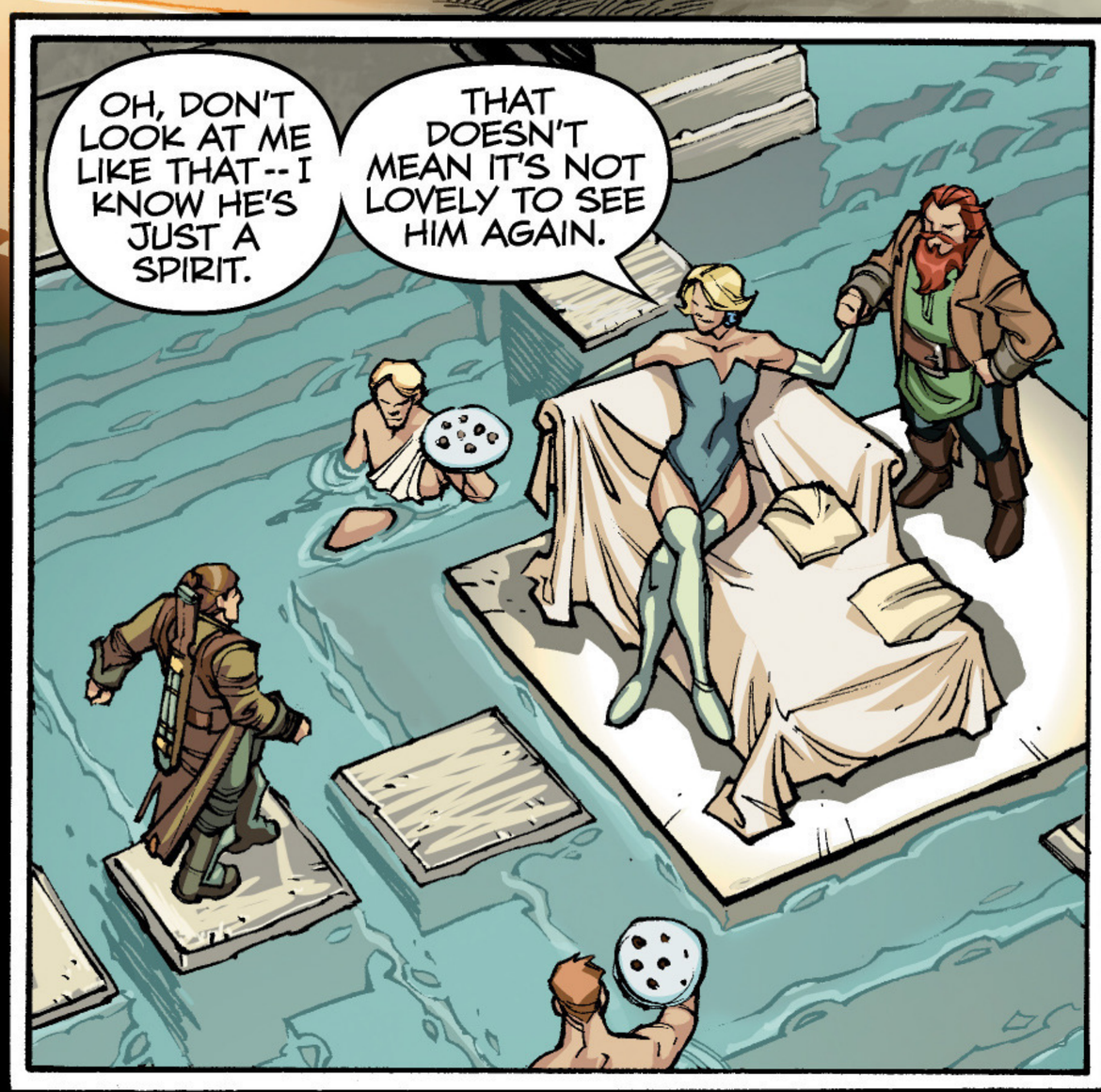
VARRIC!

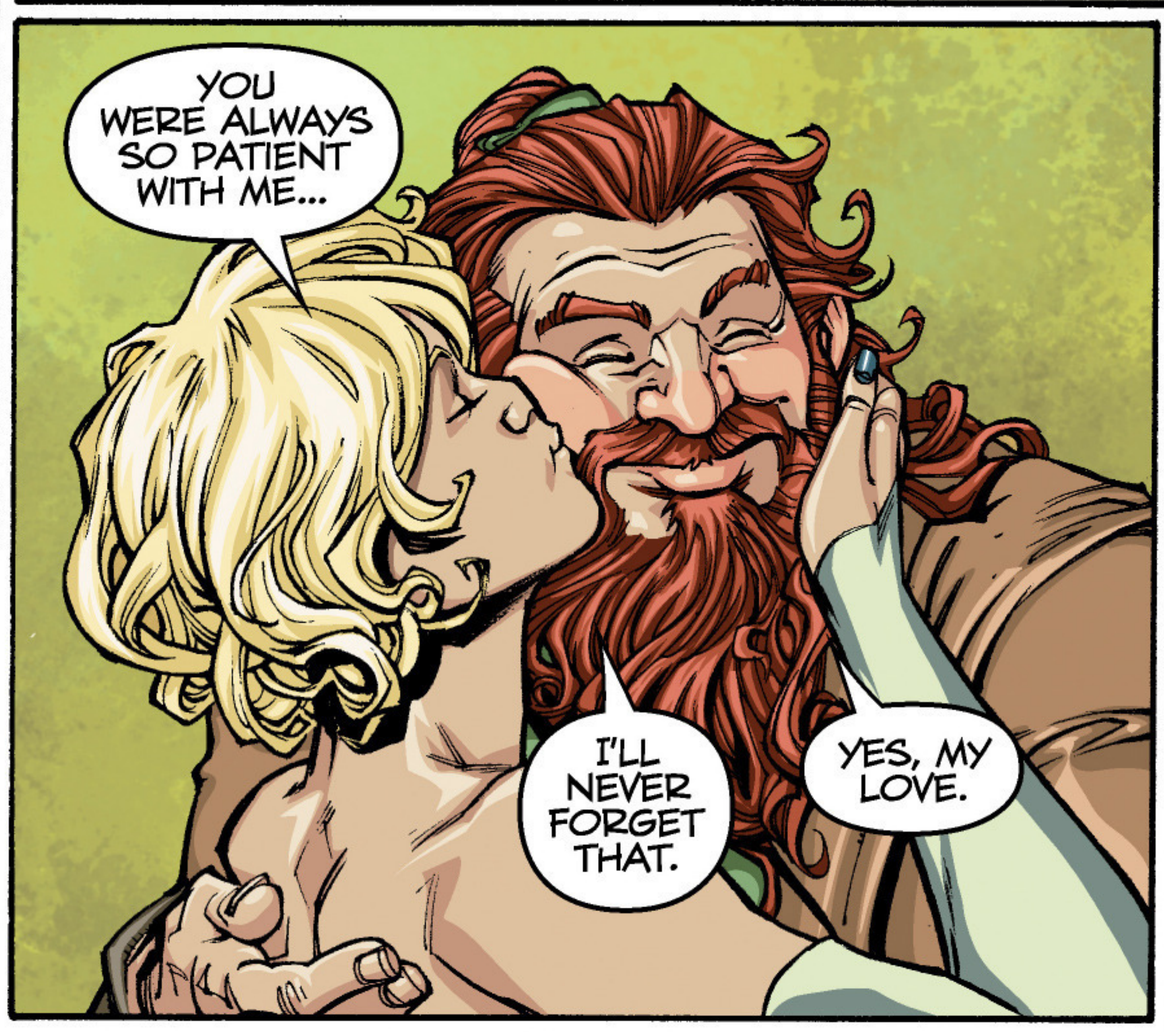
THERE YOU ARE -- YOU REMEMBER THOROLD?

MY *LATE* COUSIN THOROLD.

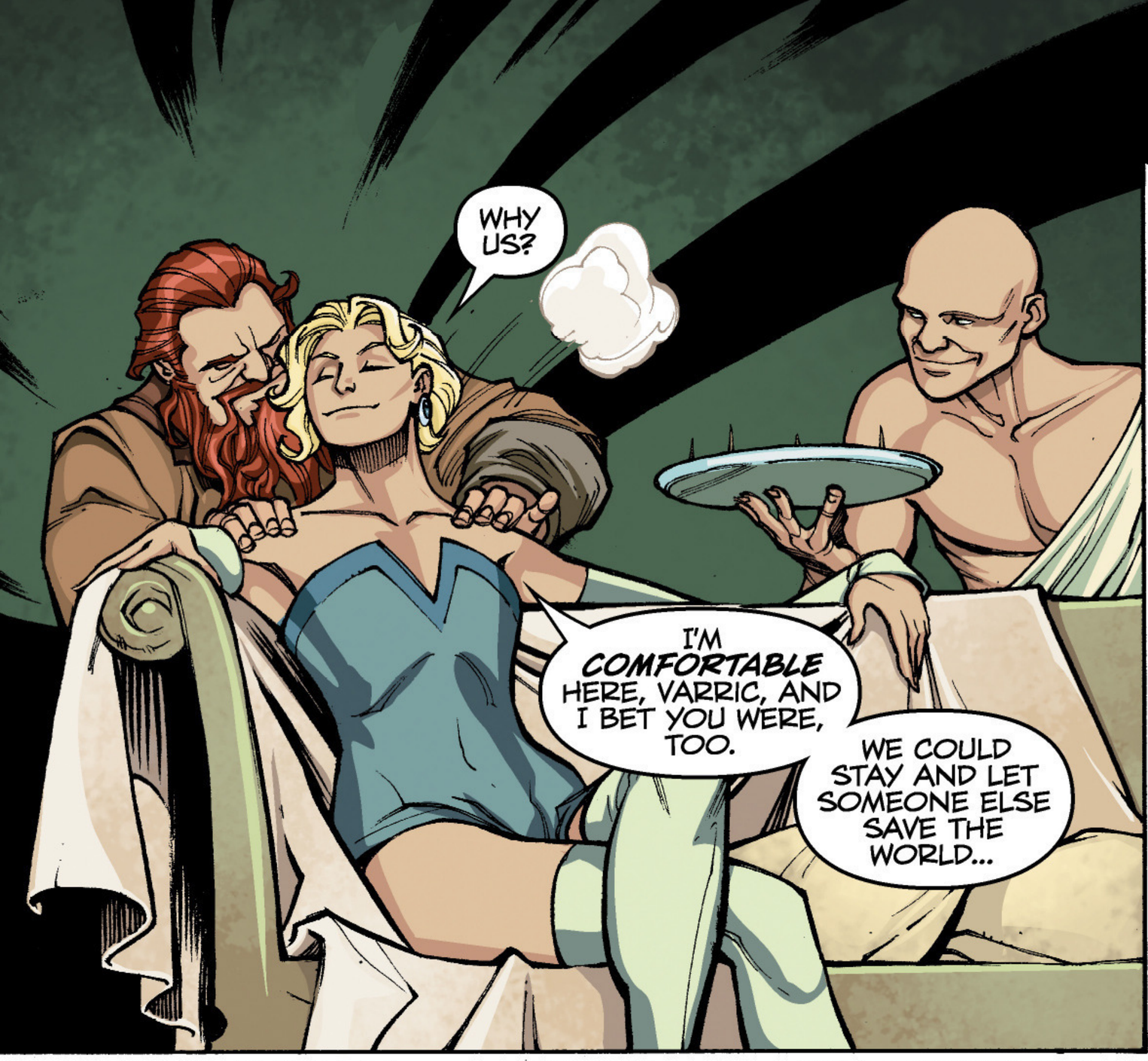
I REMEMBER.

HELLO, MAE.

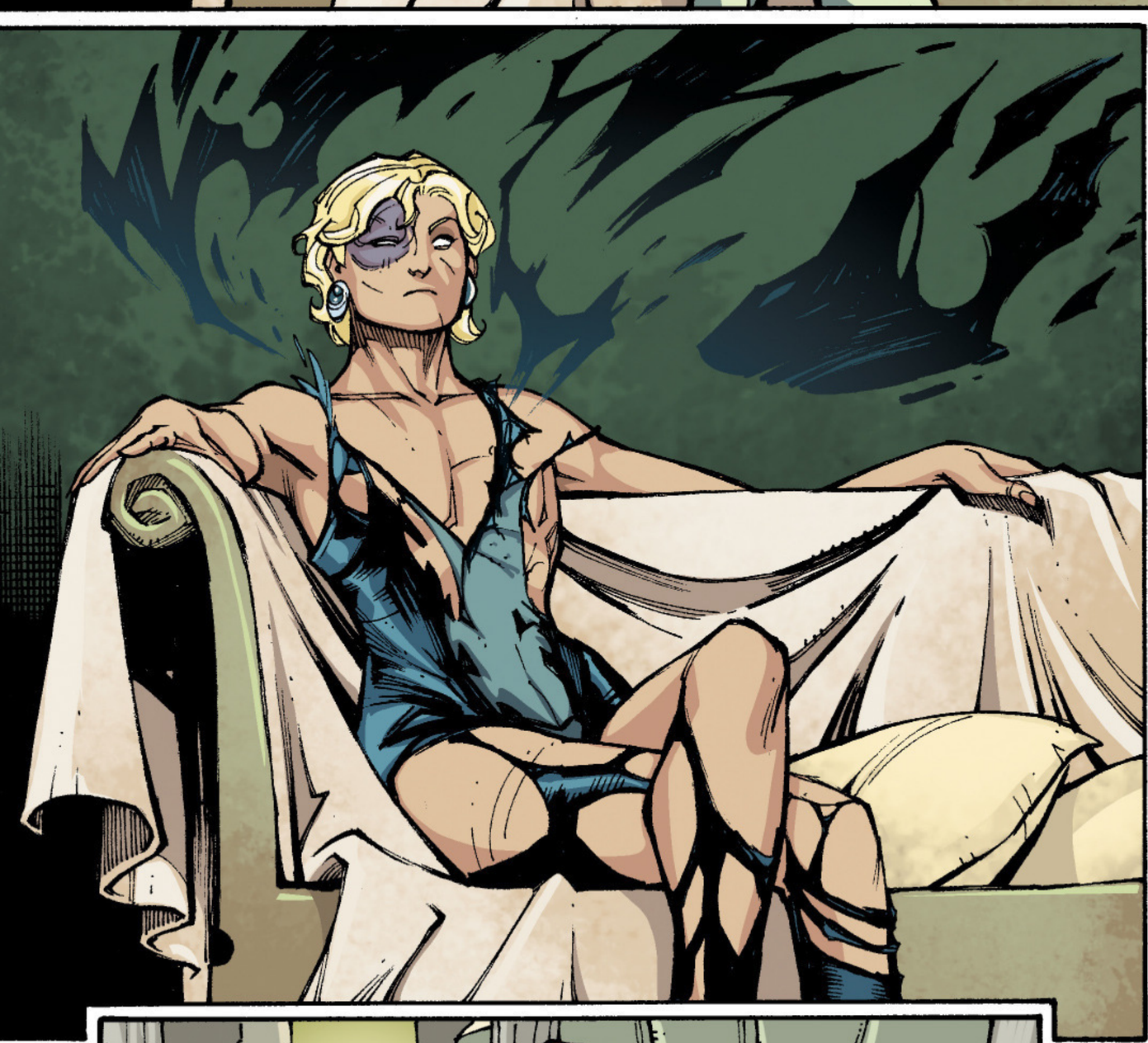




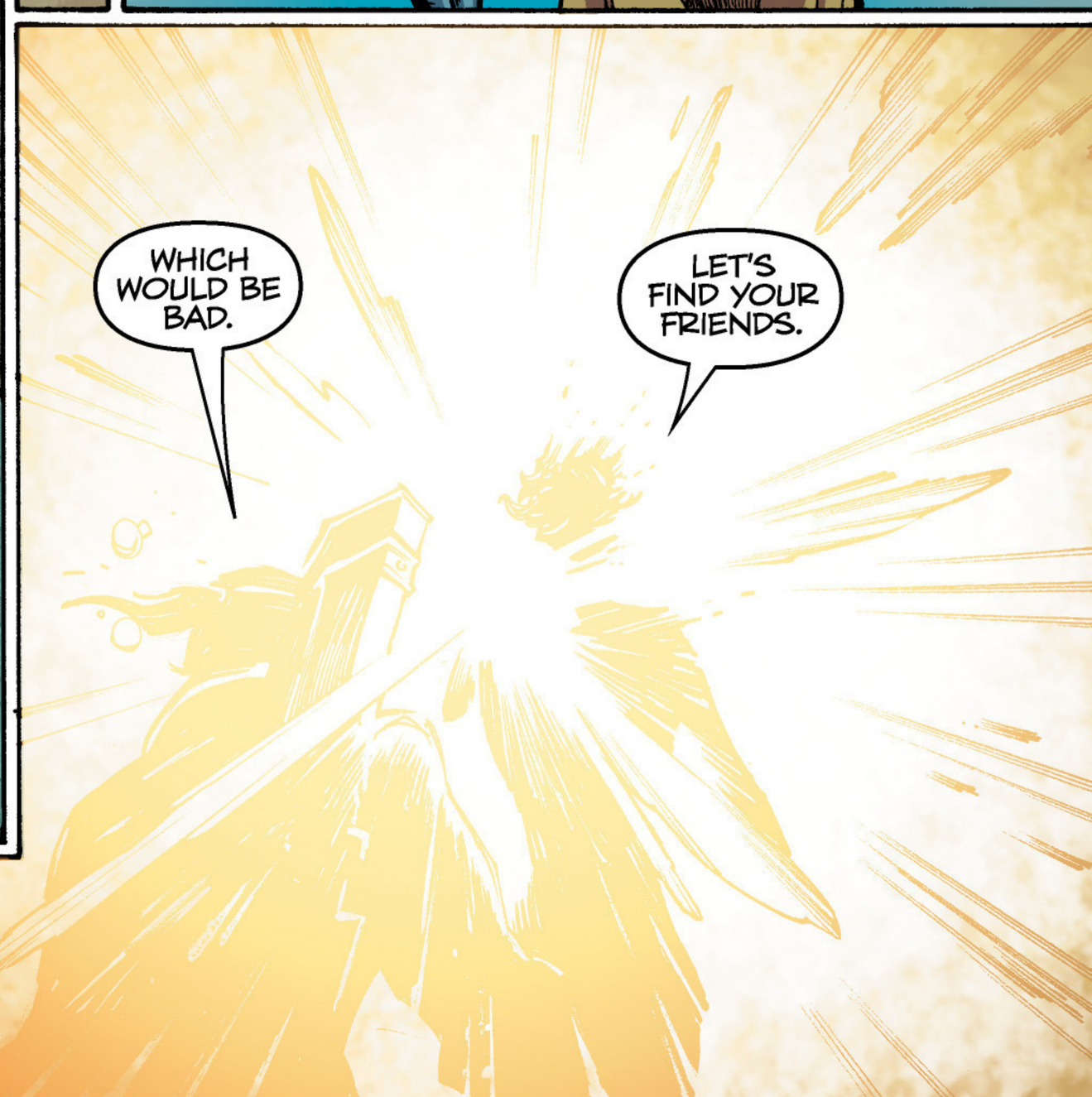
ANY CLUE HOW WE ENDED UP HERE?
YOU TELL ME, DARLING.
I WAS STILL RECOVERING ON THE PRISON FLOOR.
I FOUND KING MARIC.
HE WAS CONNECTED TO SOME KIND OF ORB.
I SHOT IT.
YOU *SHOT* THE MAGRALLEN?
I MIGHT HAVE ACTED HASTILY...
YOU *SHOT* THE MAGRALLEN!
OH, BUT DON'T BE HARD ON YOURSELF -- TITUS WILL CERTAINLY BE UNHAPPY, AND OUR ODDS CAN'T BE ANY *WORSE* IN THE FADE.
THE MAGRALLEN DATES BACK TO THE TIME OF THE *DREAMERS,* WHEN MAGISTERS COULD ENTER DREAMS AT WILL AND CONTROL PEOPLE'S *MINDS.*
TITUS IS EMPOWERING THE MAGRALLEN WITH MARIC'S BLOOD.
WITH *DRAGON* BLOOD.
OH?
YOU'LL HAVE TO ELABORATE ON THAT SOMETIME; IT WOULD EXPLAIN HOW POWERFUL TITUS HAS BECOME.
TITUS WANTS TO CREATE A CULT OF DREAMERS.
TO RESHAPE THE MINDS AND SPIRITS OF AN ENTIRE NATION, AND THEN REMAKE THE WORLD ITSELF --
-- SO THAT MAGES CAN RULE THE *UNGIFTED* WITH IMPUNITY AND BE THANKED FOR IT.
THEN WE HAVE TO STOP HIM.


WHY US?
I'M COMFORTABLE HERE, VARRIC, AND I BET YOU WERE, TOO.
WE COULD STAY AND LET SOMEONE ELSE SAVE THE WORLD...

EVEN AFTER WHAT TITUS DID TO YOU?



THE POWER YOU UNLEASHED...IT VERY LIKELY ENGULFED EVERYONE AT THE FORTRESS.
QUITE POSSIBLY.


WHICH WOULD BE BAD.
LET'S FIND YOUR FRIENDS.

MY NEW GUIDE AND I PLUNGED ONWARD.
WHERE ARE WE?
SOMEONE'S NIGHTMARE.
BASRA!
LET ME TALK TO HER.

BY THAT TIME, I HAD KNOWN THE PIRATE CAPTAIN FROM RIVAIN FOR MANY YEARS.

HRAH!

DAMN IT ALL.

VARRIC --

UGHF!

RIVAINI.

ISABELA.

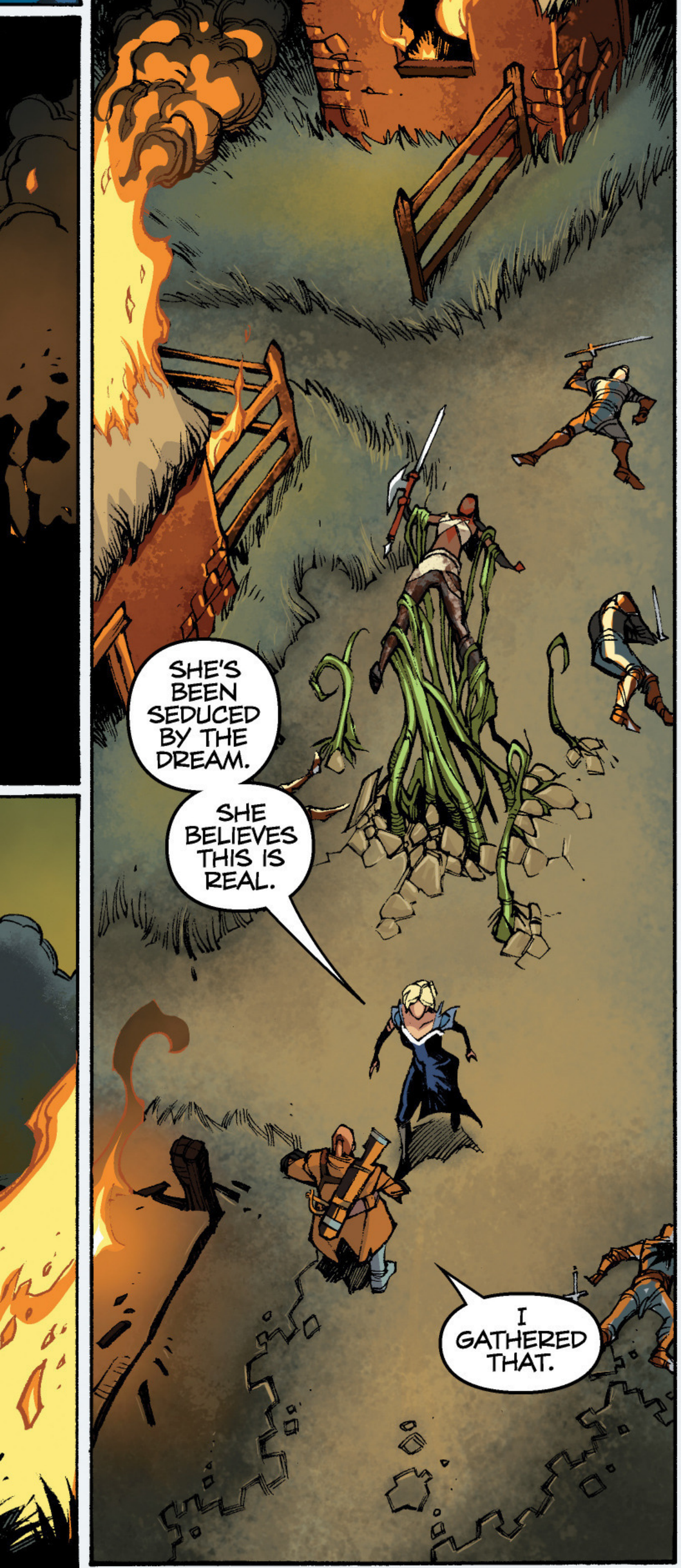
WHATEVER YOU WANT TO BE CALLED.

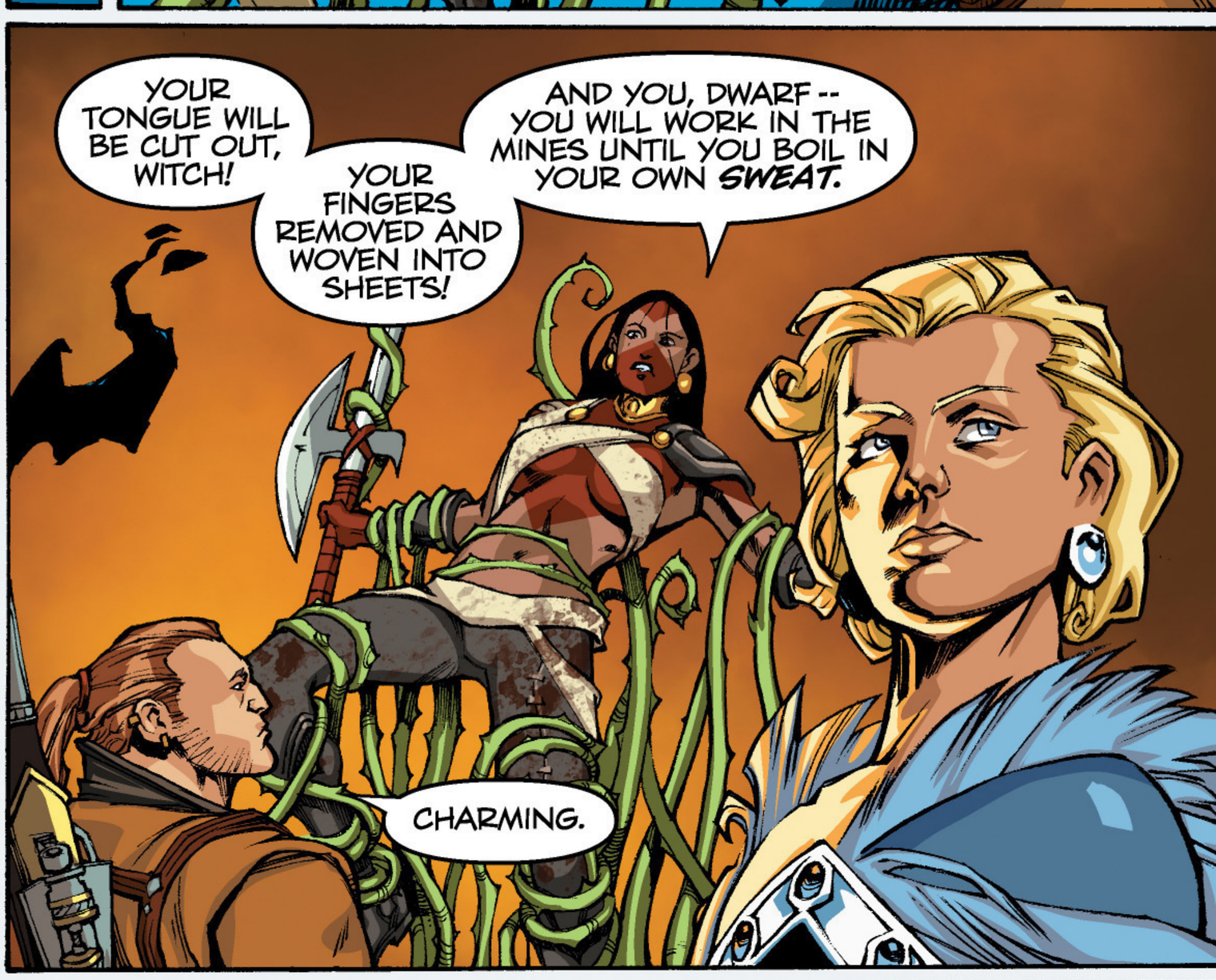
I WON'T HURT YOU.

I DO NOT KNOW YOU, DWARF.

WE FOUND HER IN THE MIDST OF A NIGHTMARE I'M NOT AT LIBERTY TO DISCLOSE.

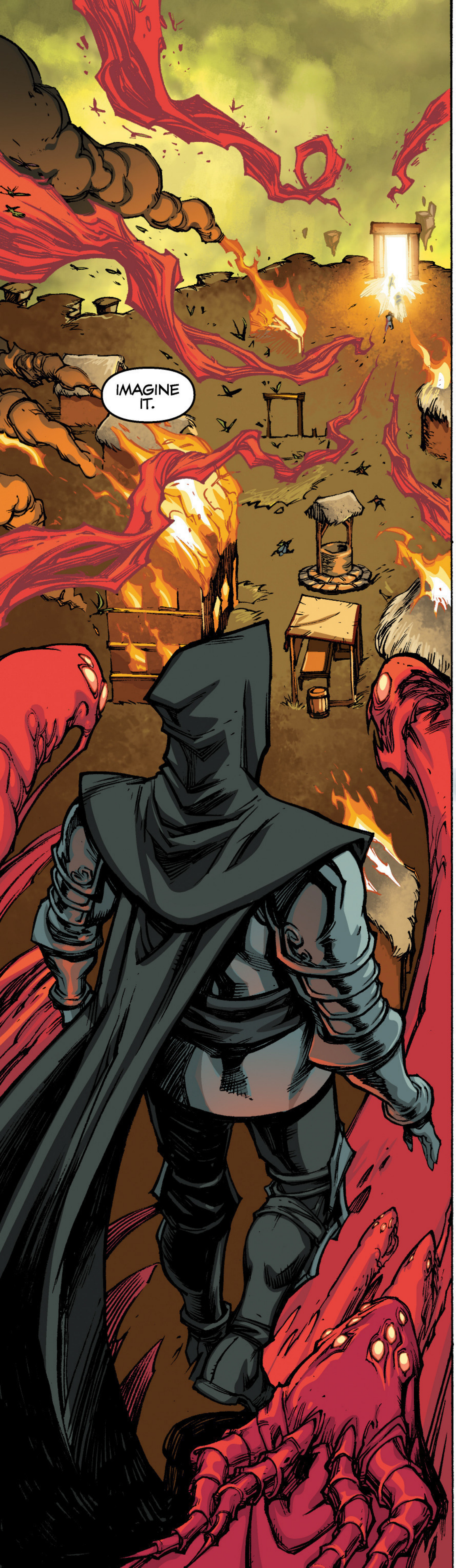
HRR!


SHE'S BEEN SEDUCED BY THE DREAM.
SHE BELIEVES THIS IS REAL.
I GATHERED THAT.


YOUR TONGUE WILL BE CUT OUT, WITCH!
YOUR FINGERS REMOVED AND WOVEN INTO SHEETS!
AND YOU, DWARF -- YOU WILL WORK IN THE MINES UNTIL YOU BOIL IN YOUR OWN SWEAT.
CHARMING.

I WILL SAY THIS: SHE HAD BEEN THROUGH TERRIBLE THINGS DURING HER IMPRISONMENT BY THE QUNARI.
WHAT IS IT?
POWER.

FOOLS.
MY REALM.
MY MAGIC.
VARRIC, HE'S CALLING ON DEMONS!
OH, MAKER.
I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'RE IN THERE, RIVAINI --
--BUT IF YOU WANT TO LIVE, COME WITH US!
YET EVEN IN HER NIGHT-MARES, ISABELA WAS MORE THAN CAPABLE.


IMAGINE IT.

MAGES SCULPTING DREAMS.
DREAMS SCULPTING REALITY.

THE OLD GODS.
THE DRAGON GODS.

WE SHALL BECOME THEM.

ISABELA HAD FACED HER NIGHTMARES IN DAYLIGHT ALREADY.
STAND BACK, BAS!
RASAAN WAS WRONG, RIVAINI.
THIS ISN'T YOU.
THIS COULD NEVER HAVE BEEN YOU.
I WILL -- I WILL NOT BE SWAYED FROM THE QUN.
THE QUN OFFERS GUIDANCE.
THE QUN OFFERS TRUTH.
SHE WASN'T TEMPTED BY THE FADE FOR A MOMENT. NOT EVEN A LITTLE.

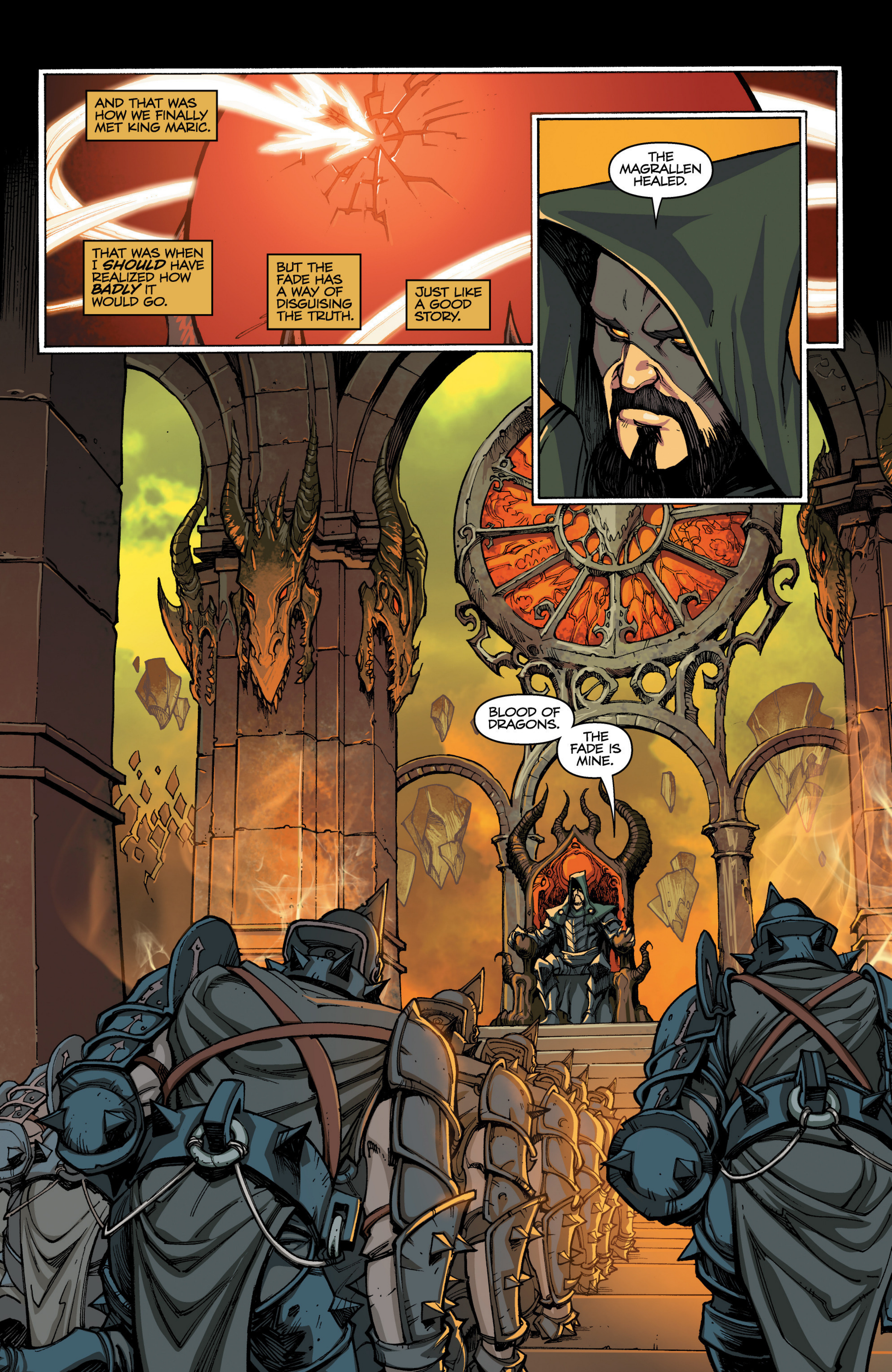
LEAVE ME ALONE, VARRIC.
DO YOU REALLY WANT THIS?
IT WOULD BE... EASIER.
SIMPLER.
IT ALWAYS IS -- LETTING SOMEONE ELSE DEFINE YOU.
I DON'T KNOW YOU, BUT I KNOW THAT MUCH.
LOOK YOURSELF IN THE EYE AND TAKE STRENGTH FROM WHAT YOU SEE -- DAMN WHAT ANYONE ELSE BELIEVES.
THAT'S MY GIRL.
LET'S MOVE, BEFORE TITUS FINDS US AGAIN.
SHE WAS A HERO, NEVER TO BE HAUNTED BY HER TRIALS OR HER DOUBTS.

WE CONTINUED DEEPER INTO THE FADE, WITH ONE LAST ALLY TO FIND.
THERE'S SOMETHING STRANGE ABOUT ALL OF THIS.
YOU NOTICED?
HOW CLEVER.
I'M SERIOUS.
TITUS SHOULD HAVE CAUGHT US BY NOW.
MAYBE HE'S ADMIRING THE VIEW.
MAYBE.
OR WE'RE GOING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION.
MEANING WHAT?
I'M NOT SURE.
WHAT WAS IT YOU SAID ABOUT DRAGON BLOOD...?

NOW... WHO DO WE HAVE HERE?
HAVE YOU HEARD THIS ONE?
A PRINCE COMES UPON A DWARF, A RIVAINI, AND A MAGISTER IN THE FOREST...
ALISTAIR?
YOUR HIGHNESS, THANK YOU.
HAVE WE MET?
APPARENTLY NOT.
WAS IT IN A TAVERN?
WAS I DRINKING?

I'M STILL FIGURING THIS OUT, SO --
-- IF I SLAP HIM, WILL IT WAKE HIM UP?
OH, DEAR BEAUTY...
...IF YOU WANT ME TO WAKE UP WITH YOU, THERE ARE MORE PLEASANT WAYS.
ARE YOU SURE THIS IS HIM?
ARE YOU KIDDING?
NO ONE FLIRTS AS BADLY AS ALISTAIR.
YOU KNOW, I'D WARN YOU ABOUT TRESPASSING ON ROYAL LANDS, BUT I SUSPECT YOU'RE AWARE OF THE LAW.
YOUR HIGHNESS, PLEASE.
YOU'RE IN DANGER.
TELL ME -- ARE YOU BANDITS, THEN?
I WOULDN'T HAVE GUESSED--
TROUBLE, MY SON?

NOW YOU'VE DONE IT.
I AM KING MARIC, SOVEREIGN OF FERELDEN AND PROTECTOR OF ITS LANDS.
WHOEVER YOU ARE, WHATEVER REASON YOU ARE HERE --
-- YOU ARE NOT WELCOME.

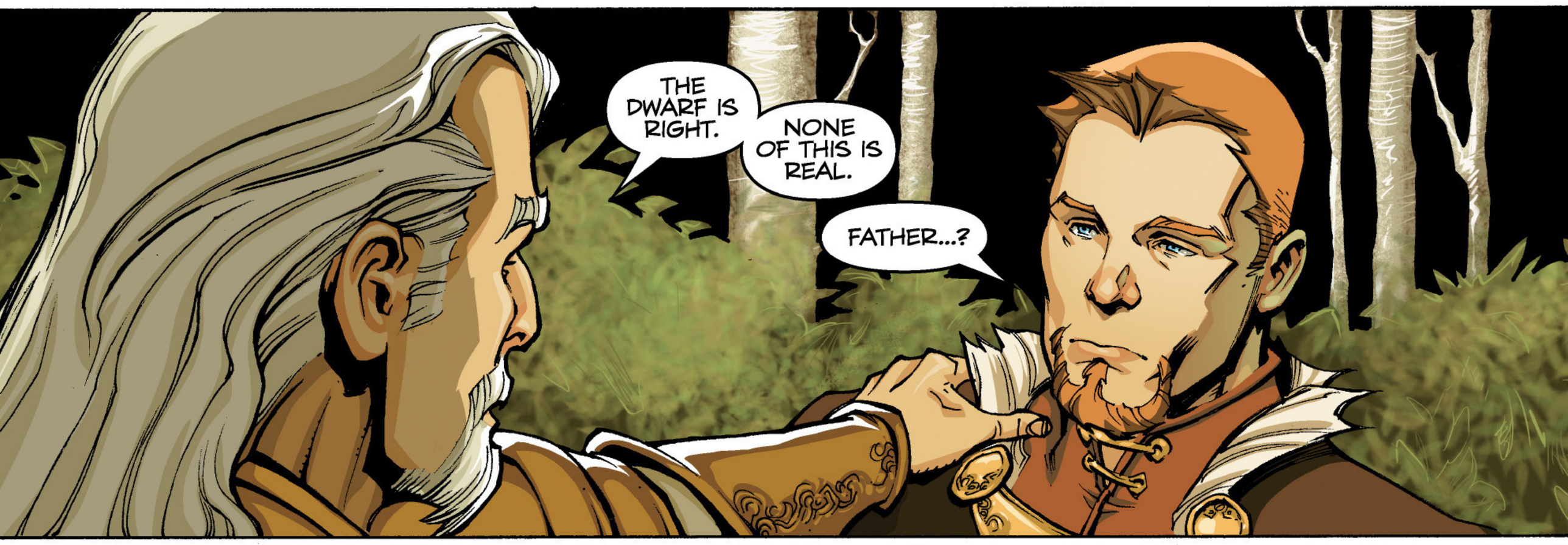

AND THAT WAS HOW WE FINALLY MET KING MARIC.
THAT WAS WHEN I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED HOW BADLY IT WOULD GO.
BUT THE FADE HAS A WAY OF DISGUISING THE TRUTH.
JUST LIKE A GOOD STORY.
THE MAGRALLEN HEALED.
BLOOD OF DRAGONS.
THE FADE IS MINE.

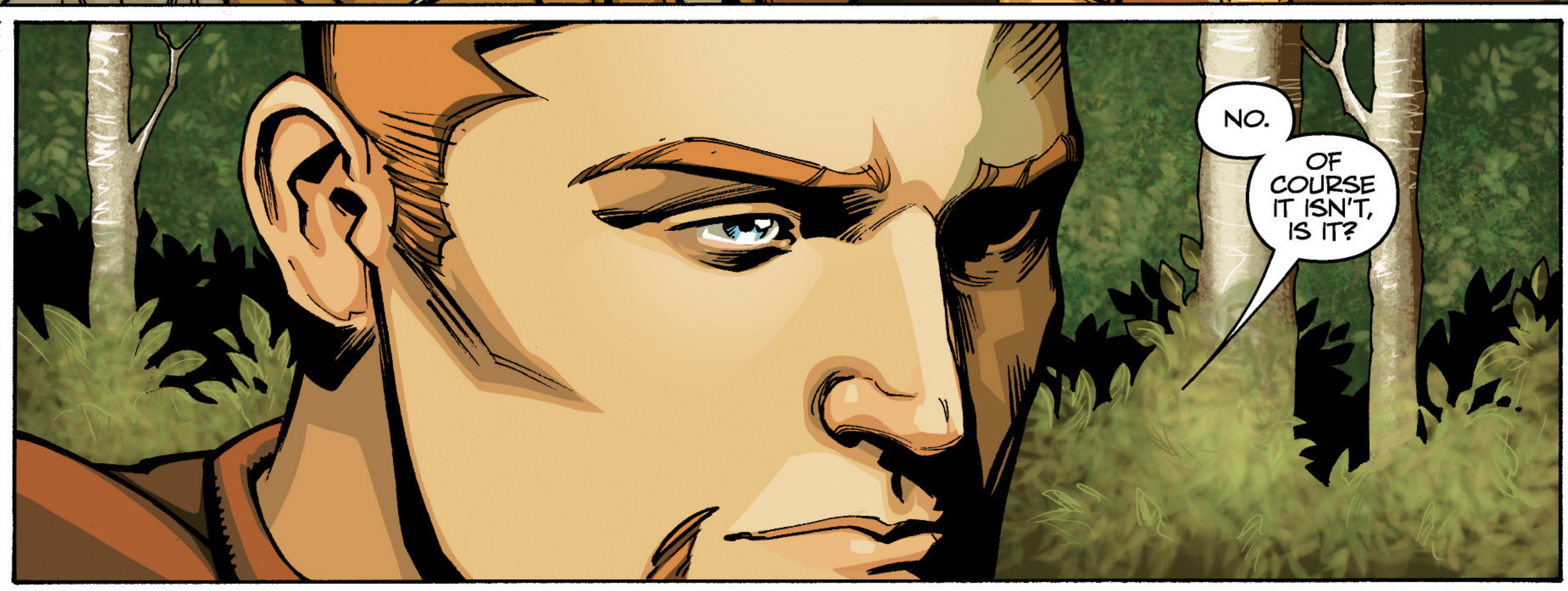
CHAPTER 3
SO THERE WE WERE -- ALISTAIR AND HIS FATHER HAD REUNITED AND OUR MERRY CREW WAS TOGETHER AGAIN.
AS IS CUSTOMARY FOR OUR PLANS, THINGS DID NOT GO QUITE AS EXPECTED.
WE'RE NOT BANDITS -- WE'RE HERE TO HELP.
AND HOW WILL YOU DO THAT?
THERE ARE DEMONS COMING --
-- SO FOR STARTERS, WE NEED TO KEEP MOVING.
DEMONS COMING -- HA!
THAT'S ONE WE HAVEN'T HEARD SINCE, WHAT, THE TIME WE FOUGHT AGAINST THE BLIGHT?
OR MAYBE WHEN THE WITCH OF THE WILDS LAST TRIED HER LIES ON YOU...

IT'S ALL RIGHT, MY SON.
LET THEM TALK.
YOUR MAJESTY, YOU MAY BE UNAWARE BUT THIS IS THE *FADE*.
YOUR BODY IS IN A STATE OF *ONEIRIC SUSPENSION* AND YOUR MIND HAS BEEN ENSORCELLED.
YOU MUST REMEMBER.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
ALISTAIR, LISTEN TO HER -- YOU'RE THE BLOODY *KING!*
MY *FATHER* IS THE KING, AND *CAILAN* WILL SUCCEED HIM -- THE CROWN WILL *NEVER* FALL TO ME, MAKER WILLING.
YOU SPEAK *TREASON.*

"I'M TIRED OF BEING A PAWN, VARRIC -- I'M GOING TO FIND AURELIAN TITUS AND I'M GOING TO KILL HIM."
YOUR WORDS, ALISTAIR.
"I'M GOING TO FIND MARIC, AND THEN I'M GOING HOME... TO BE KING."
I KNOW IT'S TOUGH, BEING HANDED SOMETHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED.
TELL YOURSELF THE STORIES YOU NEED TO TELL.
BUT DON'T BE FOOLED BY THEM.
NEVER LIVE YOUR OWN LIES.
YOU AGREE -- DON'T YOU, KING MARIC?
THAT'S REALLY MARIC?
AND HE... KNOWS?
OF COURSE HE KNOWS.

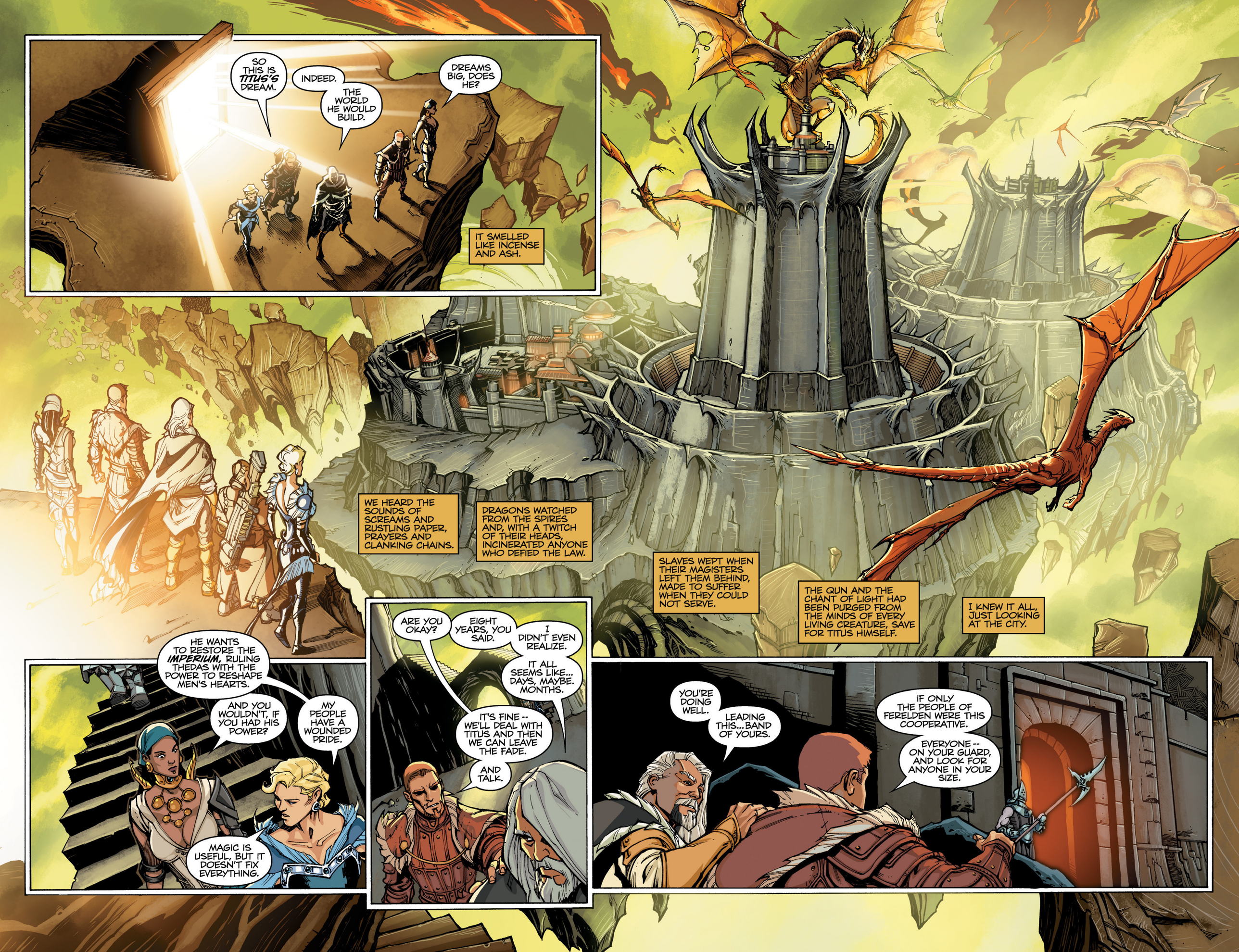
I...ALWAYS HOPED YOU WOULD FIND ME, ALISTAIR.
I SWEAR I THOUGHT YOU WERE PART OF THE DREAM.
WHAT?


THE DWARF IS RIGHT.
NONE OF THIS IS REAL.
FATHER...?


NO.
OF COURSE IT ISN'T, IS IT?

IT WAS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE; I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER.
YOU SAID THERE WERE DEMONS.
TITUS'S DEMONS--ALL OF US WERE PULLED INTO THE FADE, TITUS INCLUDED.

AURELIAN TITUS IS *HERE?*
IF THAT'S THE CASE, THEN WE MUST --
--TAKE THE FIGHT TO HIM.
WE DON'T SEEM TO HAVE MUCH CHOICE -- IT'S HIS MAGIC THAT HAS US TRAPPED, ISN'T IT?
WE KILL TITUS BEFORE HE KILLS US.
ANY IDEAS *HOW,* SPECIFICALLY?
I'VE GOT A FEW.
MAE -- REMIND US OF HOW THIS PLACE WORKS AGAIN...?
LIKE I SAID, THE FADE GUIDES YOU TOWARD YOUR DESIRE.
WHEN WE WERE READY TO GO AFTER TITUS, HE WASN'T HARD TO FIND.

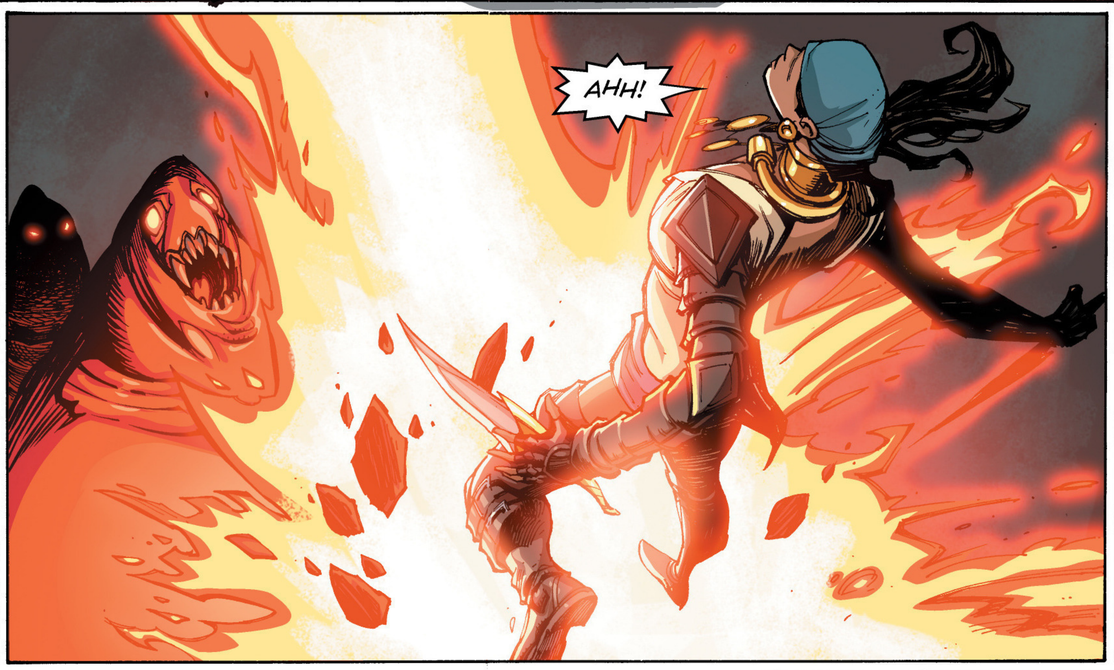

SO THIS IS TITUS'S DREAM.
INDEED.
THE WORLD HE WOULD BUILD.
DREAMS BIG, DOES HE?
IT SMELLED LIKE INCENSE AND ASH.
WE HEARD THE SOUNDS OF SCREAMS AND RUSTLING PAPER, PRAYERS AND CLANKING CHAINS.
DRAGONS WATCHED FROM THE SPIRES AND, WITH A TWITCH OF THEIR HEADS, INCINERATED ANYONE WHO DEFIED THE LAW.
SLAVES WEPT WHEN THEIR MAGISTERS LEFT THEM BEHIND, MADE TO SUFFER WHEN THEY COULD NOT SERVE.
THE QUN AND THE CHANT OF LIGHT HAD BEEN PURGED FROM THE MINDS OF EVERY LIVING CREATURE, SAVE FOR TITUS HIMSELF.
I KNEW IT ALL, JUST LOOKING AT THE CITY.
HE WANTS TO RESTORE THE IMPERIUM, RULING THEDAS WITH THE POWER TO RESHAPE MEN'S HEARTS.
AND YOU WOULDN'T, IF YOU HAD HIS POWER?
MY PEOPLE HAVE A WOUNDED PRIDE.
MAGIC IS USEFUL, BUT IT DOESN'T FIX EVERYTHING.
ARE YOU OKAY?
EIGHT YEARS, YOU SAID.
I DIDN'T EVEN REALIZE.
IT ALL SEEMS LIKE... DAYS, MAYBE. MONTHS.
IT'S FINE -- WE'LL DEAL WITH TITUS AND THEN WE CAN LEAVE THE FADE.
AND TALK.
YOU'RE DOING WELL.
LEADING THIS...BAND OF YOURS.
IF ONLY THE PEOPLE OF FERELDEN WERE THIS COOPERATIVE.
EVERYONE -- ON YOUR GUARD, AND LOOK FOR ANYONE IN YOUR SIZE.

FIND THEM.
THE ACOLYTES SPEAK TO THE SPIRITS, MAGISTER, AND THE SPIRITS SEARCH THE FADE.
THEY HIDE.
SOMEHOW, YES.
THEIR MAGE--
ALL WILL FALL.
KINGS OLD AND NEW.
THEIR BLOOD GRANTS STRENGTH.
ALL PART OF THE PLAN, THEN?

MAYBE IT'S MY IMAGINATION, BUT YOU'RE SOUNDING A LITTLE DESPERATE.
YOU SHOULD HAVE RUN.
THERE ARE VOID PLACES.
GAPS BETWEEN DREAMS.
THERE, YOU MIGHT HAVE LIVED.
WE'LL TAKE OUR CHANCES.

SO ALL OF THIS WAS JUST FOR *POWER?*

THAT'S *IT?*



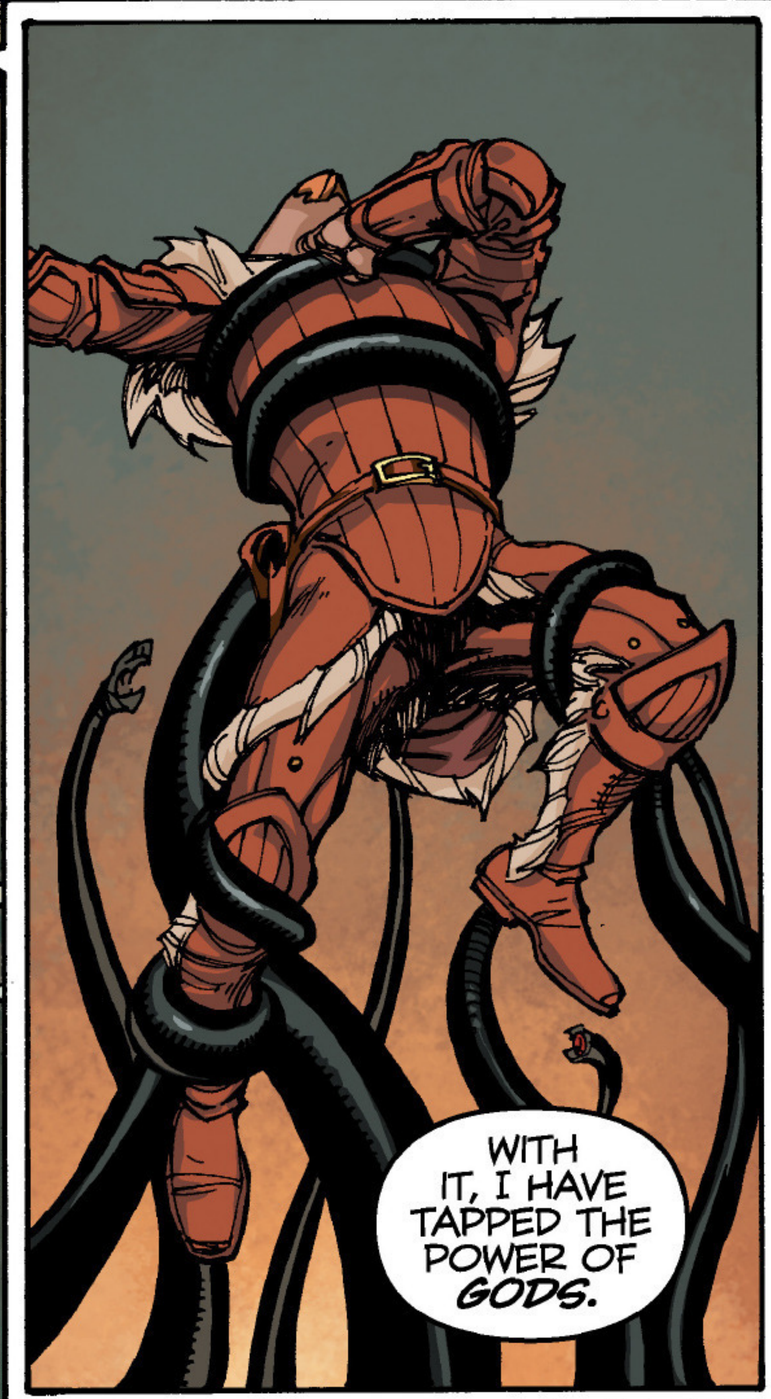
POWER EXALTS.

THE DREAMERS OF OLD COMMANDED THE FADE.

THE FADE IS MAGIC.
THE FADE IS REALITY ITSELF.

THE LAST MAGISTERS OF TEVINTER WERE SO CLOSE.

ALL THEY NEEDED WAS THE BLOOD OF THE GREAT DRAGONS.


WITH IT, I HAVE TAPPED THE POWER OF GODS.

NOW... WOULD BE A GOOD TIME...

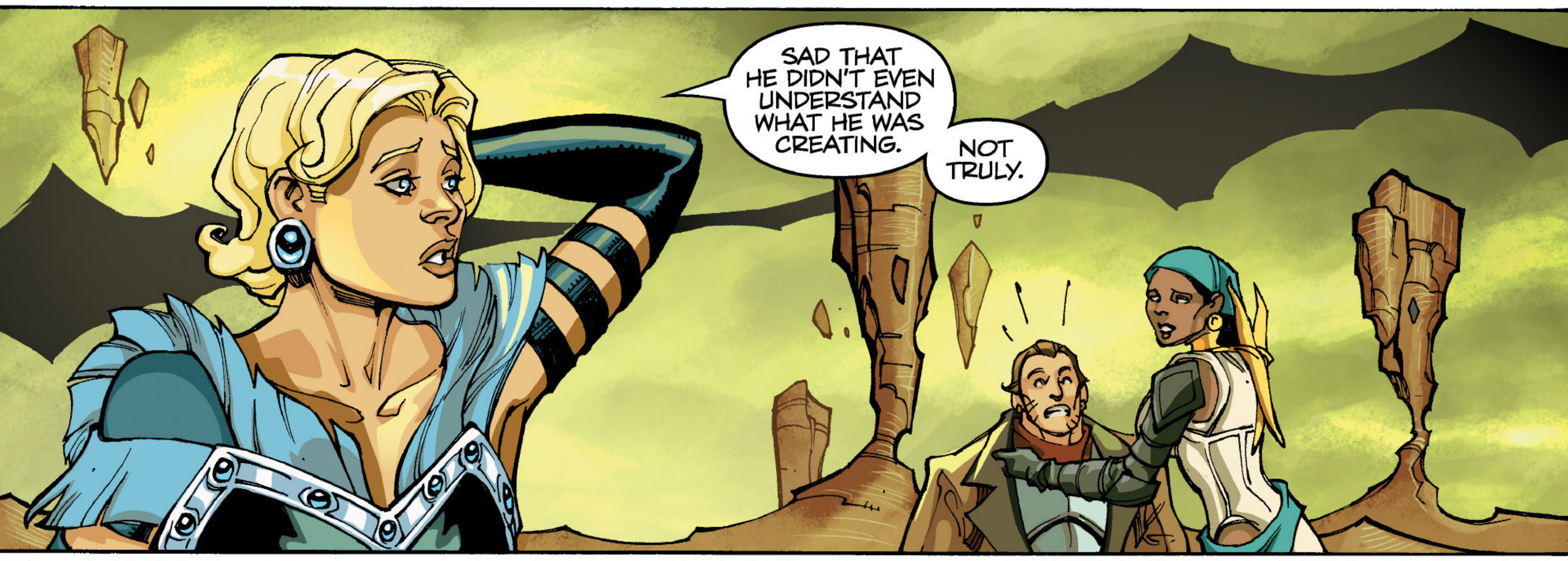
ENOUGH.
LEAVE HIM BE.

YOU?
YOU ARE BUT A REMNANT.

DIE BY WHAT WROUGHT YOU.
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE...?
YOUR REIGN IS OVER, TITUS.
IT NEVER REALLY BEGAN.
KEEP THE DEMONS OFF HIM!
KEEP THEM BACK!
THIS WORLD IS *MINE.*
TEVINTER WILL BE AS IT WAS IN *LEGEND.* A DREAM MADE REALITY!
THE MAGRALLEN'S MAGIC IS OUR LEGACY...

BUT IT'S EMPOWERED BY MY BLOOD.
YOU ARE NOT THE DREAMER HERE.
TEVINTER... OUR GOLDEN CITY...
I AM.

THAT'S IT?
WE WON?


SAD THAT HE DIDN'T EVEN UNDERSTAND WHAT HE WAS CREATING.
NOT TRULY.

CAN WE LEAVE THE FADE NOW?

ANY HOLD TITUS HAD ON US IS GONE.

YOU CAN LEAVE.

WE CAN? WHAT ABOUT YOU?

I...SAW HIS BODY IN TITUS'S LABORATORY.

WITH RESPECT, YOUR MAJESTY, YOU DON'T LOOK *WELL.*

NO.

I SUPPOSE THE MAGRALLEN IS ALL THAT'S KEEPING ME ALIVE, NOW.

BUT YOU HAVE A HOME TO RETURN TO.

A *LIFE.*

I *HAD* A LIFE.

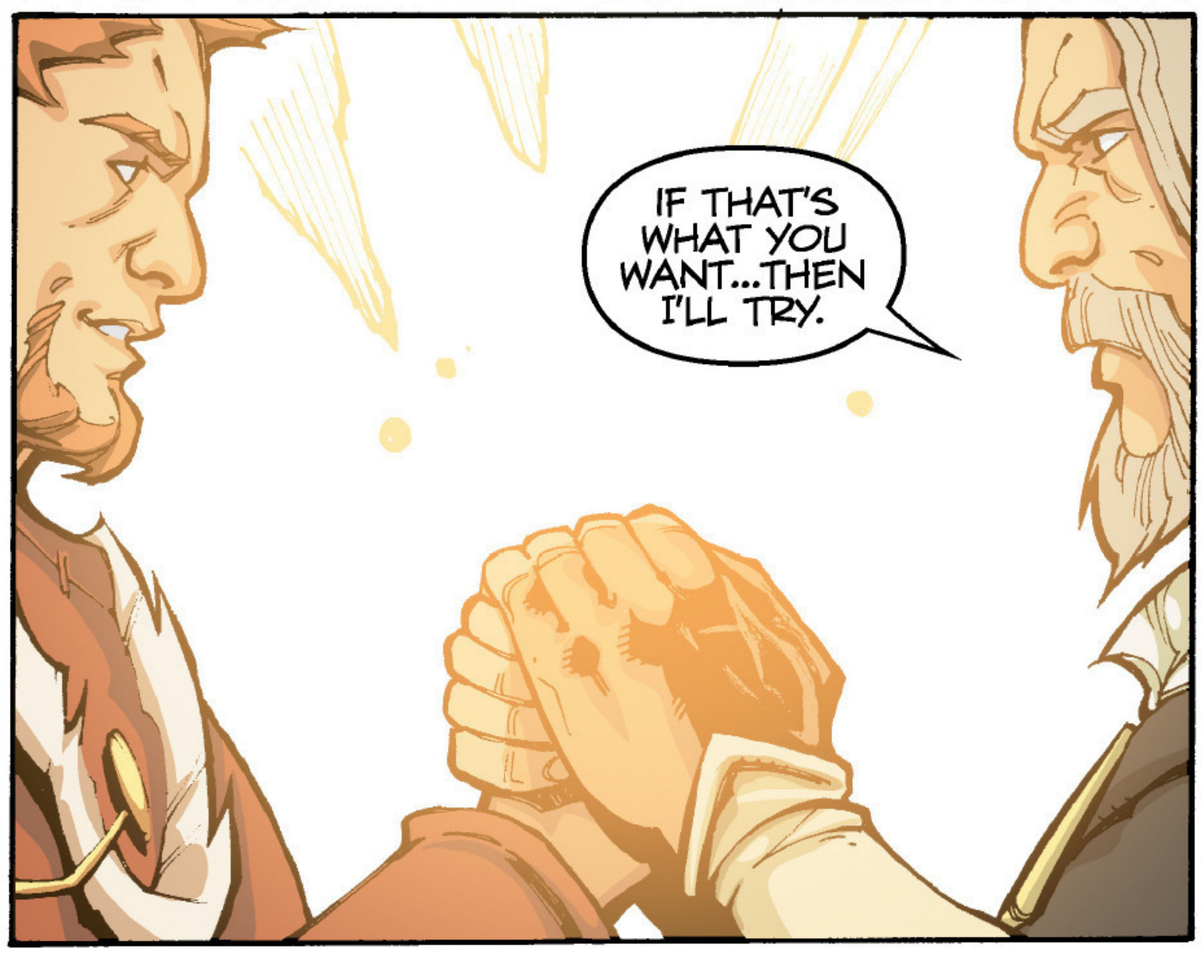
THE PEOPLE I LOVE ARE ALL *HERE* -- CAILAN, YOUR MOTHER, LOGHAIN...

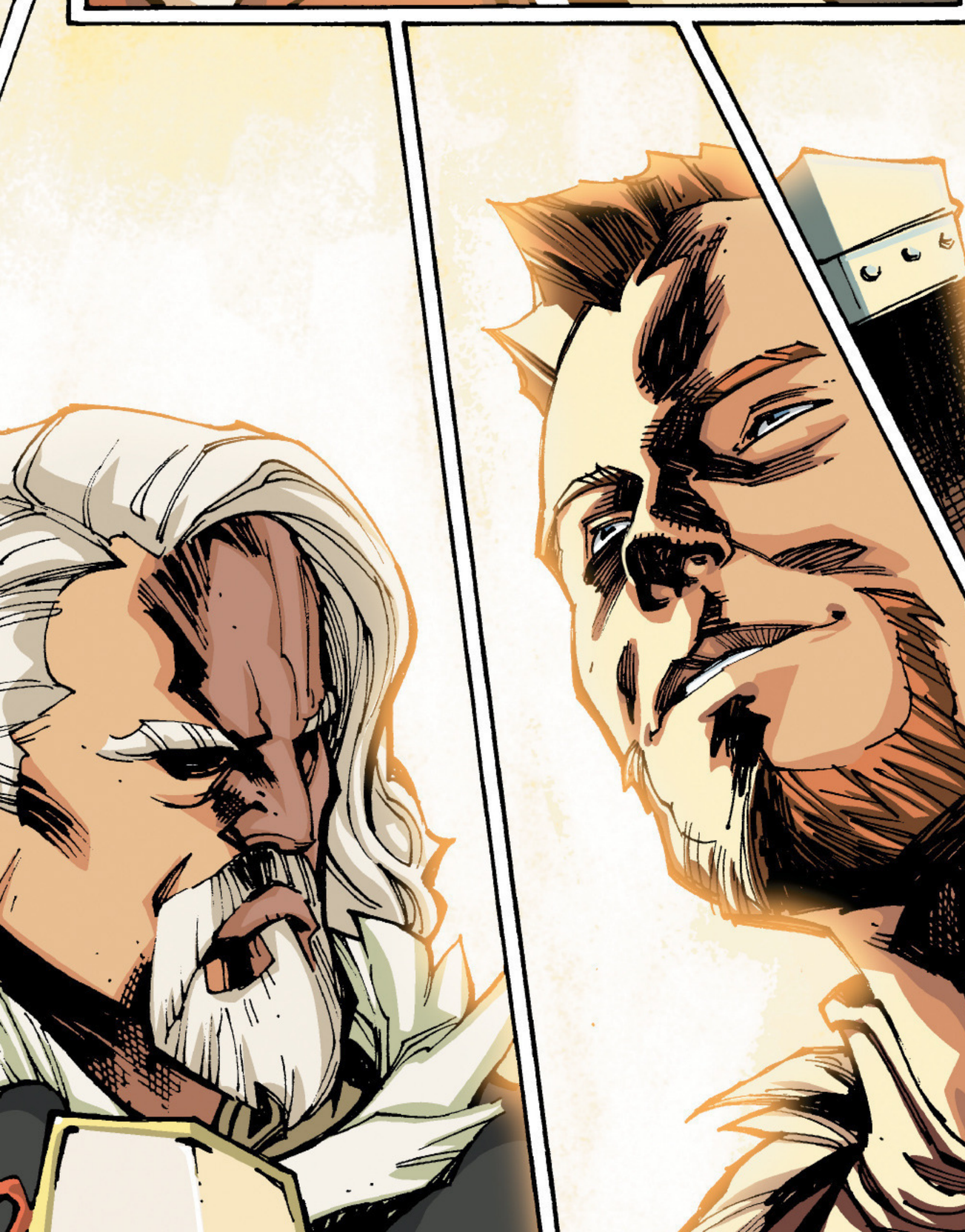
...NONE OF THEM ARE IN THE REAL WORLD ANY LONGER, ARE THEY?

I AM.

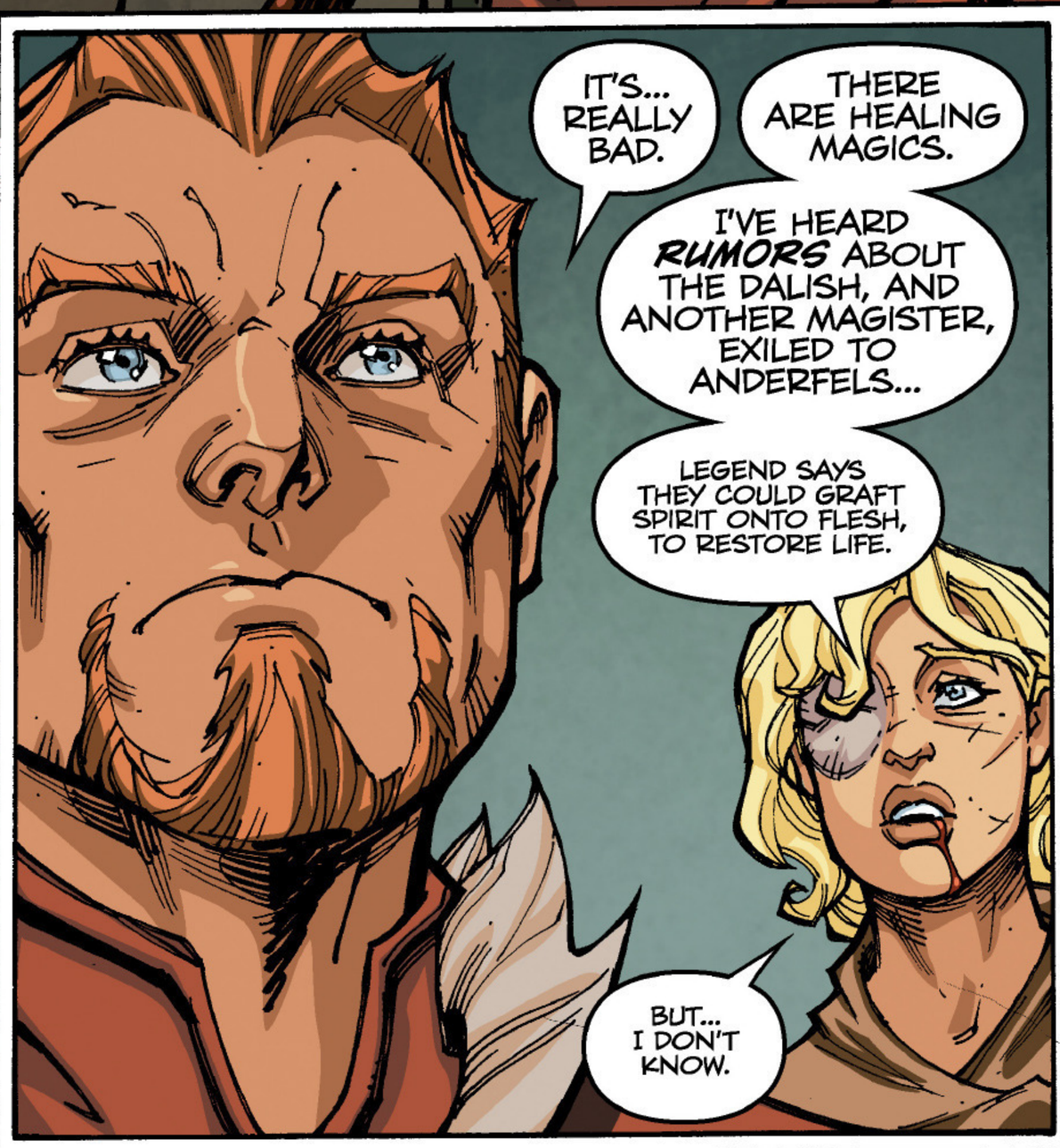
YOU'RE THE KING NOW, AND PROBABLY A DAMN SIGHT BETTER AT IT THAN I EVER WAS.
YOUR MOTHER AND I TRIED TO SPARE YOU THIS LIFE -- I DIDN'T WANT IT EITHER -- BUT...
YOU DID THE BEST YOU COULD.
ALISTAIR...
SEEING YOU AGAIN, KNOWING FERELDEN IS IN GOOD HANDS... IT'S ENOUGH.
YOU DON'T NEED ME.

NO.
I DON'T.
BUT YOU CAN'T LIVE IN A DREAM, NO MATTER HOW HAPPY YOU ARE -- YOU COME BACK AND YOU TRY AGAIN.
I DON'T NEED YOU, BUT YOU DESERVE A SECOND CHANCE -- WE CAN DO IT TOGETHER.


IF THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT...THEN I'LL TRY.



THAT'S WHEN I WOKE UP.
AGAIN.
FOR REAL THIS TIME.
UGH.
EVERYTHING LOOKED WRONG, AFTER SO LONG IN THE FADE.
LIKE REALITY WAS A REPRODUCTION -- A CHEAP PORTRAIT OF SOMETHING WE'D SEEN AND FORGOTTEN.
BUT MY BACK ACHED AND I COULD SMELL THE RAIN THROUGH CRACKS IN THE CEILING.
I HEARD YELLING -- TITUS'S MEN CALLING A RETREAT.
AND FOOTSTEPS.
VARRIC?


IT'S... REALLY BAD.
THERE ARE HEALING MAGICS.
I'VE HEARD *RUMORS* ABOUT THE DALISH, AND ANOTHER MAGISTER, EXILED TO ANDERFELS...
LEGEND SAYS THEY COULD GRAFT SPIRIT ONTO FLESH, TO RESTORE LIFE.
BUT... I DON'T KNOW.

IT'S A TERRIBLE THING, TO LIVE AS PART OF SOMEONE ELSE'S STORY.
YOU NEED TO FINISH THIS, OR THE STORY WILL NEVER END.

I THOUGHT I NEEDED MARIC...
...HE NEEDED ME.

THAT MORE OR LESS WRAPPED UP OUR ADVENTURE.

BETTER THAN I'D FEARED AND WORSE THAN I'D HOPED.

ALISTAIR SAID HE WOULD KILL TITUS, FIND HIS FATHER, AND THEN RETURN HOME TO BE A GOOD AND PROPER KING.

AND HE DID ALL THAT.

ISABELA ASKED ME LATER IF I THOUGHT HE DID THE RIGHT THING. I TOLD HER THERE'S NO WAY TO KNOW.

WE ALL GO THROUGH OUR ENTIRE LIVES NOT KNOWING. WONDERING. TRYING.

UNTIL WE SLEEP.

THE END

COMICS & GRAPHIC NOVELS / Fantasy

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OMNIBUS

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